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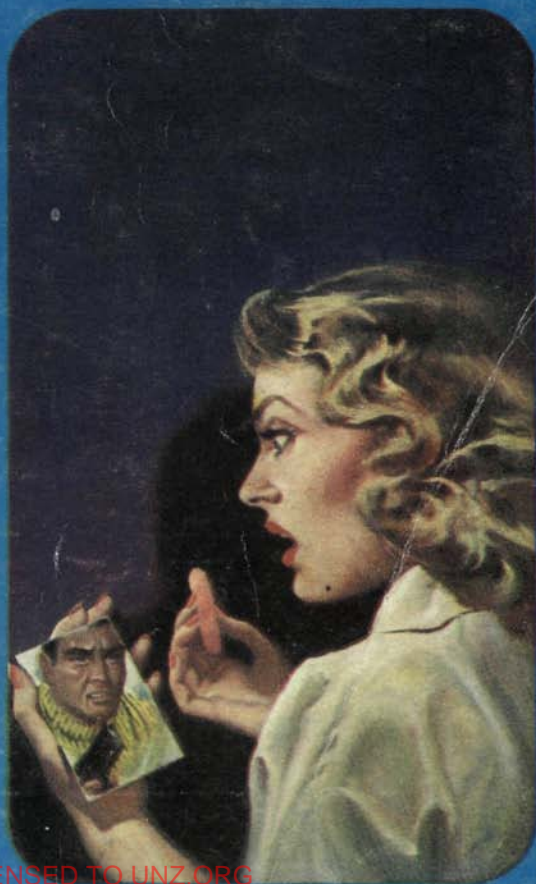
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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1974
VOL. 35, NO. 5.

TWO COMPLETE SHORT NOVELS

NEW MIKE SHAYNE ADVENTURE THE LITTLE GIRL MURDER CASE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

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THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



THE LITTLE GIRL MURDER CASE

When Mike Shayne delivered the quarter of a million dollars, he didn't know it would bring death to a small time hood and an old lady; but he did know murder was a high price to pay for one little girl!

by BRETT HALLIDAY



MIKE SHAYNE knew that there were hundreds of men on the South Florida Gold Coast who would kill or risk being killed for far less than the quarter of a million dollars resting in the case on the floor of his car that night.

His client, Mrs. Jean Gallo of the very wealthy Miami Beach Gallos didn't think the money was important. In her place, Shayne reflected, he might not think that a quarter of a million dollars was that important either. Jean Gallo had many millions of dollars, but only one

child. That child—the blue eyed, golden haired little Jeannie—was in the hands of kidnappers.

The negotiations had been brief and to the point. The money had been demanded in the first phone call, and instructions for its delivery were given in the second call. There were no ifs, ands or buts.

"Nine o'clock, sharp. Don't come early and if you're more than five minutes late—forget it," the voice on the phone had instructed Mrs. Gallo. "Only one person and the money. No

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cops or FBI, or the kid gets it. Understood?"

The Gallos were going along with the demands precisely as instructed, and Mike Shayne concurred with them. Time enough for the police when the child was safely home.

The redheaded detective was acquainted with the spot mentioned in the instructions. Years back, it had been headquarters for a gang that sold moonshine whiskey and ran a cheap, and very crooked, poker game. After the law broke up that activity, the place had been deserted. The tide of suburban development had not yet extended that far, and the shabby neighborhood was a haven for bums and freaked out hippies who camped out at night in the rundown buildings.

Even the road to the old house was a prime example of deterioration, its former hardtop pitted with chugholes of varying sizes.

Shayne drove slowly, as much to avoid damage to his tires and shock absorbers as to avoid arriving too early. He reached the spot right on time, parked, and turned out his car lights.

There was an ancient wire fence along the road, and back of it a thick line of hedge-gone-wild and scrub growth. Shayne parked and walked to

where the gate to the driveway to the old house had once been.

There were no street lights, but he could see well enough in the reflected lights of the City to the south and east. He stopped where the gate had been and waited.

The voice came from the thick brush along the fence behind the big redheaded private detective.

"Who are you?"

"Mrs. Gallo sent me," Shayne answered distinctly. "She sent me to make a trade."

He held the brief case at arm's length above his head where the hidden man could see it easily.

"Pass it over," the voice said.

Shayne said: "Not yet. I said this was a trade, not a giveaway. First you show me the goods I came to buy. Then you get the money—and don't worry; it's all here."

There was a moment of silence behind him. Then the voice came again. "I could clobber you and take it. There's a gun on your back."

"You might," the big man said into the dark, "but then again I might take you if you try. We're doing this your way, fella. The way you laid it out. But I got my orders too. No money till I see the kid."

"You're full of buttsy's," said the voice in the dark. "To the

devil with your nuttsy-buttsy's. So okay then. I show you the kid. Then you open that case so I can see money and put it down at your feet. You walk over and get the kid and go home. Okay?"

"Okay," Shayne said. "Get on with it."

Something the unseen figure had said struck a responsive chord in the redhead's mind. He knew he'd sort it out later, but now he concentrated on the task at hand.

He saw the beam of a flashlight from the bushes behind him. It shone across the high weeds to the wreck of the old farmhouse and blinked on and off three times. Then stayed off.

Two dark figures came around the corner of the old house. One was a child. The flashlight came on again just long enough for the big man to see yellow hair and the little blue overalls Jean Gallo had been wearing when she was missed.

Mike Shayne opened the brief case and put it down in the grass at his feet. The light flicked on the neatly wrapped bundles of currency.

"Okay," the voice said. Then: "Go get the kid—and don't look back."

Mike Shayne walked quickly towards the house calling out as he came: "Jeannie? I'm a

friend of your mommy, Jeannie. Wait for me."

The little figure hesitated and then came to meet him.

The adult figure which had been with the child melted back into the darkness behind the house. At no time had Shayne seen it clearly.

He made no effort to follow, just picked up the little girl, making sure it was the same face as in the pictures Mrs. Gallo had shown him earlier that day. Children instinctively liked the big man. This one nestled against his shoulder and said only: "Mommy. I want mommy."

"Your mommy wants you too honey," big Mike Shayne said softly. "We'll go find her right now."

When he turned back to the road the briefcase full of money was gone. There was no sign of the man who had spoken to him from the bushes.

Shayne went right to his car. It was only as he started to drive back to the city with the little girl nestled against him on the front seat, that he looked back and said under his breath: "Goodnight Dave boy. Have fun with all that government green."

The gears had finally clicked into place. Mike Shayne knew who the collector of the ransom was.

II

HALF A MILE down the dark road, Mike Shayne pulled over to the side long enough to call the Gallo home on the car phone.

"I've got your little girl safe and sound," he said when Mrs. Gallo answered.

"Oh, thank God," she said. "Bring her home right now."

"I'll come as fast as I can," Shayne said. "I ought to call the police now. I know who the kidnapper is—at least one of them."

There was a pause at the other end. "No. Please," Mrs. Gallo said quickly. "At least not now. Just come right on in with little Jeannie. I'll talk to you about the rest of it when you get here. Is she all right? Does she need a doctor?"

"She's all right," the big red-head said. "As far as I can see she's just tired. Not even frightened."

"Thank God," Jean Gallo said again.

"One sleepy little girl coming right up," Mike Shayne said and broke the connection.

After that Mike Shayne drove smoothly and steadily to the Gallo mansion in the exclusive island section of Miami Beach.

When he got there the lights were on outside the entrance

and a small group of family and servants headed by Mr. and Mrs. Gallo were standing outside the house waiting for him.

Jeannie flew into her mother's arms for a heartfelt reunion, and then was rushed upstairs to bed by mother and her devoted nurse.

Mike Shayne waited in the downstairs study and library of the big house, where a servant quickly brought him a glass and a bottle of his favorite brandy. At Mike Shayne's request he also fetched a carafe of ice water—the big man's favorite chaser.

Shayne didn't have to wait long. In moments the Gallos hurried back down the carpeted winding stair.

Jean Gallo was a strikingly lovely grey-eyed blond in her mid-forties. The white linen dress she wore was simple, with a simplicity that spoke of a top-flight french fashion designer, and she wore a priceless rope of matched pearls around her throat.

Her husband, "Teddy Gallo, sportsman" as the social pages of the news media always called him, was a good ten years younger than his wife. He was also very handsome, in a dark and foreign way.

He shook the big detective's hand and looked him over

keenly as he did so. Mike Shayne was meeting Teddy Gallo for the first time, and he returned the appraising look.

"Splendid work," Teddy Gallo said. "We're extremely grateful."

"Everything went easily enough," Mike Shayne said.

"More to the point, Mr. Shayne," Jean Gallo said, "you brought our darling Jeannie back safe and sound. I won't forget that."

She had a slip of paper in her hand and now she passed it into the detective's strong big hand.

"My check for a thousand dollars," she said. "As agreed."

"Thank you."

Then she held out another slip of paper.

Mike Shayne took it and looked at it. This was another check made out in his name, for the sum of ten thousand dollars. He looked at her inquiringly.

"It's a down payment and retainer," Jean Gallo said. "I'm offering you twenty thousand dollars and all your expenses for the arrest and conviction of the swine who kidnapped my baby and for the recovery of the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars you paid them tonight. If you have to buy information or bribe someone, that comes under the head of expenses."



"That's a big job," Mike Shayne said. He didn't sound in doubt that he could carry it out—only making a statement of fact.

"It is," she said, "and you're a big man in your profession. If anyone can do it, you can. If it makes a difference, the ten thousand is yours to keep whether or not you succeed."

"It makes no difference to me, but I think the police would be cheaper, and probably as effective," Shayne answered.

"I don't want the police right now. I want you, Mike Shayne. I trust you and have confidence in you—which is more than I can say for Chief Painter."

"It's your money," Mike Shayne said. "I'll do my best. Now that your child is safe, however, you'll have to notify the police anyway.

"I want you to understand," he went on, "that I have to give them whatever information I have. I work alone. They have squads of men. My advantage is, people are more willing to talk to a private eye. And I've got a head start."

"It's understood," Mrs. Gallo said. "But I want the best. And that's you."

Teddy Gallo had been standing watching his wife with what seemed almost to be astonishment. Now he spoke up for the first time.

"Look here, Jean—are you sure you want to do this? I thought we agreed the money wasn't that important. Just so we got our little girl back safe and sound."

"It isn't the money." Her voice told Shayne that this was a woman who wasn't about to forget she had been both robbed and terribly frightened. "It's the abominable arrogance of that scum in daring to do this to us! That's what has to be punished so that they will never dare try it ever again. If their kind isn't taught that lesson, then the little Jeannies of our world will never be safe again."

"But Jean, dear, don't you think..."

"No! I've hired Shayne! There's nothing more to be said, Teddy."

"I'll get working on it now while you notify the authorities," Mike Shayne interrupted the near argument. "At least I already have a good idea who one of the kidnappers is and..."

"What!" Teddy Gallo was surprised. "How on earth could you?"

"Easy," Mike Shayne said. "The man I gave the money to used a phrase I've heard once before. Only one local man uses it a lot, a small time hoodlum. His name is Dave Tendler. You can tell that to the police when you call them. They'll want to question him. I only hope I can talk to him first."

"My God," Teddy Gallo said, "to identify a man on the strength of one phrase spoken in the dark by someone you can't see. Are you sure you heard the man correctly?"

"Yes, Mr. Gallo. Of course, a grand jury wouldn't accept that sort of thing as evidence. But I'll locate the man and see what else I find. I told you this hood is a small timer. Hardly the man to plan and execute a kidnapping of this sort for so much money. He's just fronting for someone else, and that's the

man I really want. And I'll get him."

III

"I hope so," Gallo replied. 'But I really think. . ."

"Instead of holding Mr. Shayne here with your talk, why don't you leave," Jean Gallo snapped. "He's got work to do, and I suppose I've got to call the police."

Teddy Gallo put his hands in his pockets, embarrassed but silent. Jean Gallo's face softened. "Why don't you take a run over to Miami? I can handle everything. You just relax. But don't spend too much money at the Golden Rooster. We've already lost a quarter of a million tonight."

"Mr. Shayne will get that back for us I'm sure," Teddy Gallo said with a nervous laugh.

"I know he will," Mrs. Gallo said. Then, turning to Shayne: "Report directly to me. You're working for me personally. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Mike Shayne said, as he watched Teddy Gallo's slumped form moving toward the door. "I hope you understand you have to notify the police. Just give me a half hour start."

"Right," Mrs. Gallo responded crisply. "I need an hour, really. To calm myself." She winked. Shayne winked back.

WHEN SHAYNE left the Gallo home he didn't drive back across the causeway to Miami City. Instead he parked near a Collins Avenue bar and made a phone call from there. He called his old friend Betty Jane Ramirez, operator of one of the most active Numbers Houses in Dade County.

"Mike Shayne!" she exclaimed when she recognized his voice. "What can I do for you, loverboy?"

"I'm looking for little Davy Tendler," the detective said.

"That's funny, lover. So is Lolita. At least that's what I hear," the notorious Madame laughed.

"Lolita?"

"His wife—or maybe I better say his bride. They've only been married two or three weeks. A real hot romance one day, and he's missing the next."

Mike Shayne had the phone to his right ear. Now he reached up a big hand to tug at his left ear lobe. "I didn't think Nuttsy Buttsy Dave was the marrying kind."

"Well he is now, and to a real beauty too. The story is he promised her some sort of a big strike they could go to the Argentine with if she'd marry him. I suppose it turned out no better than his usual pipe

dreams and he just decided to duck out on her."

"Could be," Mike Shayne said. "Where do you think he ducked to?"

"Try around Fifth Street on South Miami Beach. You know. That's where he grew up."

"Thanks, beautiful," Mike Shayne said. "That's what I'll do."

Two hours later Mike Shayne was tired, and only a little wiser. He'd talked to a dozen bartenders, ticket takers at the strip joints, topless waitresses and the like.

All of them knew Dave Tandler. None of them had seen him that night, or, for that matter, for weeks or months before. If little Davy was back on his home grounds, he certainly wasn't advertizing the fact.

Yet Mike Shayne had gleaned two items of information. One girl had a friend who had seen Davy Tandler a couple of days back. The friend couldn't be found.

More important was the bartender in the Fifth Street joint. "No, Mike, I ain't actually seen Davy myself. Only you ain't the only one asking for him. A good looking blond was in here this afternoon. Didn't give a name but she looked like she wanted him real bad.

"About a hour later this big, black haired dude came by and

asked after Davy too. No—I don't know neither of them. Never seen them before. Now you. What the hell has Davy been up to? Heist the First National Bank?"

Mike Shayne didn't explain. He let the bartender have his laugh.

There had been nothing more, and before leaving the area, Mike Shayne called his answering service. There had been no calls.

Mike Shayne then tried Lucy Hamilton's home number. His secretary answered so fast he knew she must have been waiting for the call. Her first words confirmed it.

"Michael! Where are you? How long will it take you to get here?"

"With luck only twenty minutes, Angel. I'm over on South Beach. Been looking for Davy Tandler. You know—Nuttsy Buttsy Dave. I'll come right in."

"Did you find him?" Lucy asked.

"No I didn't. Why?"

"Because you aren't the only one looking for him, Michael. The reason I want you to drop by is that Dave Tandler's wife is right here at my apartment looking for you. She's been trying to find Dave for two days, she says, and now she wants to hire you to locate him for her."

"She's not the only one," Shayne said, "But she's in luck. I want to have a talk with her. Hold her there."

"Right," Lucy Hamilton said. "But hurry, Michael. This girl is about desperate. She may do anything. I managed to get some hot food in her and a drink. She hadn't eaten all day. It didn't really calm her down, though. Believe me, this is one worried girl."

"Don't worry, Angel," Mike Shayne said. "I'm on my way now."

He hung up the phone and headed for his car

IV

WHEN THE big man reached Lucy Hamilton's apartment on the northeast side of Miami, she was waiting for him with a cup of hot coffee laced with brandy.

The girl with her was startlingly beautiful, long haired blue-eyed blond. Her figure was slight but well-developed. She wore an expensive gold mini dress and an old white sweater tossed over her shoulders and white sandals. The dress looked new and Mike Shayne figured she must have bought it for her honeymoon.

The big redhead nodded to the girl, gave Lucy an affectionate kiss, and then sat down,

accepting Lucy's offer of coffee royale gratefully.

"All right now," he said then, in a gruff but warm and friendly tone, "nothing can be as bad as you look, young lady. Tell me what it's all about and I'll see if I can help."

"It's Dave," Lolita said, "my husband, Dave Tendler. He's missing. He walked out of the house two days ago, saying he had some business to do and not to worry. He promised he'd be back."

"That isn't unusual," Mike Shayne said. "Husbands do that sort of thing sometimes. He'll probably show up. Might be waiting for you at home right now."

"No he isn't," she said. "I try the phone every few minutes."

"Where have you been living?"

Lolita gave him the address. It was on the northwest side of town and not far from the spot where Shayne had made the ransom payoff earlier that evening. It fitted.

"How well did you know Dave before you married?"

"Not too well," Lolita said, blushing. "We only been married less than a month, and we met in a bar. It was like love at first sight, if you know what I mean. I tried every place I could think of. I came to you because everybody in town knows you can find anything.

Besides a friend of yours told me to see you."

"What friend?"

Lolita gave a sidelong glance at Lucy Hamilton before she answered. "The lady numbers bookie. You know."

"I know," Mike Shayne said. "B.J."

"That's her."

"Okay now what makes you think Dave isn't just drunk or gambling?"

"Dave loves me." Lolita said it defiantly, as if daring Shayne to say any differently. "He wouldn't stay this long without a word unless it was trouble. Besides there's that Blackie. He means trouble. You can believe me."

"Blackie?" Mike Shayne lifted his coffee cup, and took a long sip.

"Blackie Kidd or Card or something. A big guy, real tough. He got awful thick with my Dave the last couple of weeks. They was always talking where I couldn't hear. I think he got Dave in on some deal with him. I don't trust that man. He wears a gun."

"He'd use it, too," Mike Shayne said. "I know who you mean. And you don't have any idea what they were up to?"

"Not an inkling," Lolita Tandler said. "They wouldn't tell me anything. It was real big, though. Dave talked about a strike that

would put us on easy street like. You know how it is?"

"Okay," Mike Shayne nodded. "Maybe I can help. I don't know. You go in the bedroom now for a minute and rest. I want to talk to Lucy here. Then I'm going out, but I want you to stay right here and wait for me. I'll let you know if I find anything—and if Dave is in trouble, you'll know sooner if you stay here where I can reach you than if you're out wandering around town. Will you do like I say?"

"I will," she said. "I trust you Mr. Shayne. Before God I do."

When the girl had left the room, Lucy Hamilton turned to the big redhead.

"What's going on, Michael? You said you were looking for Dave Tandler yourself. What kind of trouble is he in?"

"I'm not sure, Angel," Mike Shayne said. "I made the payoff for the Gallo thing earlier tonight. The man I gave the money to was Nuttsy Buttsy Dave Tandler. That means he's in big trouble. Dave's not in the two hundred and fifty thousand dollar class. He isn't tough enough to hold up his end with Blackie Cord either."

"The Gallo kidnap?" Lucy Hamilton said. "Whew! If Dave was the man you paid off, didn't he recognize you?"

"I don't think so. He was be

hind me in some bushes, hiding himself. I doubt he got a good look at me. When he used his flashlight it was on the money, not me. I never turned to face him. I was just the guy who brought the money."

"That sounds reasonable. I was afraid he might tell Blackie Cord who you were."

"I don't think so. Anyway, I'm banking on it. I'm going out now and try to find Blackie-like I told the girl."

"What about Dave?"

"Dave wasn't the man to do this snatch. He was just a patsy—and Blackie Cord set him up. Question is, who hired Blackie? Or has he finally hit the big time on his own?"

V

MIKE SHAYNE headed north along the Boulevard. He knew where Blackie Cord usually hung out, a rough clip-joint near the Broward County line.

The sign out front said: "Girls! Girls! GIRLS!!" and the regulars at the place knew that the girls were topless and at times very obliging in the rooms upstairs. They also knew about the gambling tables in the big room back of the bar, for regulars only.

Mike Shayne went around by the alley and came in through the kitchen where a couple of



weary and hard working cooks barely noticed his passing.

He expected Blackie Cord to be in one of the booths in the dimly lit bar and to be watching the street door.

Cord was in the booth all right.

He was watching the door leading in from the kitchen.

That gave him a split second start on the big redheaded private detective.

It was enough to get him through the door leading to the stairs to the second floor, but not enough to let him stop and bolt that door.

Mike Shayne could move with the speed of a striking panther when he wanted to in spite of his bulk. He was through the door almost before Blackie Cord hit the fourth step

up. As Cord made the top step, one of Mike Shayne's big hands clamped his left ankle.

Cord twisted in mid air. He was almost as big and almost as fast as Mike Shayne. Almost wasn't enough.

He twisted in mid-air and as his left side hit the carpeted floor of the corridor, his right hand was pulling a thirty-eight Smith and Wesson from its belt holster.

Mike Shayne stamped down one big foot on the gun and the hand that held it, and Cord lost all interest in firearms. In spite of himself he yelled with pain.

Mike Shayne yanked the cursing Cord to his feet. The noise brought one of the girls to the door of her room a little way down the hall.

Mike Shayne jerked one big thumb at the girl. "Go downstairs and have a couple of drinks. I want to talk to this bum alone for about ten minutes. I'll use your room and leave the rent on the dresser."

By this time the girl had recognized the big man. "It's you, huh? Okay, just don't smash anything in there." She went on down the stairs.

Mike Shayne hauled Blackie Cord into the room. He had to slap him around a couple of times; but that was all. Most of the fight was already out of the big hoodlum.

"What in the hell is this all about?" he blustered. "I ain't done nothing to you, Shayne."

"I haven't done a thing to you either," Shayne said. "At least not yet I haven't. I might change my mind any minute, and then I could get real rough. I want some questions answered."

"What kind of questions?"

"The kind you won't want to answer—but you will, buster. You will. Now to start with, who were you watching for when I came in just now?"

"I always watch doors. So what?"

"So if it's the law you watch for, you watch the front door. This time you were watching the back. That means you expected somebody you knew, someone who knows this fleabag. Are you going to tell me who?"

"You're off your rocker."

Mike Shayne gave Blackie Cord a back handed swipe with his big hand. It was powerful enough to put the big hood sprawling across the bed. "Talk: Next time I'll knock you clean through the wall."

"If you gotta know, I was waitin for my bookie. I made a hit on the fifth race today."

"That's the laugh of the week," Mike Shayne said. "Do I have to kill you to get the truth out of you?"

"That's the truth. I swear it."

"Like hell it's the truth. You were waiting for little Davy Tendler, weren't you?" Mike Shayne could tell by the man's eyes that he'd scored.

"If you know so much," Cord said, rubbing his sore face, why do you ask me?"

"Because by now there's a police bulletin out on Tendler," the detective stated. "That means there'll be a call for you, too, because you're his partner in this caper. If I get the money back, maybe it'll go easier for you. But if I don't, you better remember what the Man on the Bench gives out for a snatch."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I never was mixed up with a kidnap. I swear it, Shayne."

"Save your breath," the big detective said. "You and Dave swiped the little Gallo kid from the beach and held her two days for ransom. It had to be your caper, because Davy Tendler hasn't the brains or the guts to plan a big snatch. Well—now the buyer wants her money back."

"I still don't know what you mean. Believe me," the hood said, "if I had the money you want, I'd hand it over. I don't even know what money you're talking about."

"I'm talking about the two hundred and fifty thousand dol-

lars in small bills I delivered to Davy Tendler earlier tonight. That's what I'm talking about."

"I never heard about any two hundred and fifty G's," Cord whined. "If little Davy got any such money from you, he sure didn't bring it to me. Search me."

Mike Shayne didn't bother. He yanked the hood to his feet. "Okay," he growled, "You and me are going to take a little ride over to your pad and look around. Maybe we can locate the long green there."

"Don't make me laugh, shamus."

"If there's one thing I can promise you, Blackie," big Mike Shayne told the hood, "it's that I'm not about to make you laugh. Scream maybe. Moan a lot for sure, but not laugh, Blackie. Not laugh. Now do you go peacefully, or do I pound you to a pulp and drag you?"

The hood moved peacefully, still rubbing his jaw.

Shayne took Cord in his car. He could always come back and search the hood's car, but he didn't think he'd have to. He was fairly sure Blackie Cord had still been waiting for Nuttsy Buttsy Dave to show up with the ransom money. If they had already split the money, Cord would have been long gone with his share.

The hood lived in a flashy, new, four story apartment building near the Boulevard and One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth St., N.E.

The building took up most of a block and enclosed a big swimming pool and patio arrangement. Cord lived on the third floor so they took the self-service elevator up.

Cord opened the door with his key.

Mike Shayne pushed the big hood in ahead of him. He followed and hit the light switch near the door.

An overhead fixture flooded the dark living room with light, picking out the garish and expensive furnishings, the gold colored wall-to-wall carpeting—and the prostrate body of a man face down and motionless on the floor in the center of the room.

This time Blackie Cord was too fast for the big private eye. He didn't even yell—just spun on his heel and was out the door and away as fast as he could run down the hall. He'd pulled the door closed behind him. The snap lock had caught and before Shayne could get the door open, Cord had disappeared.

The redhead wasted no time in a chase. Cord's flight had told him plenty. From the way the hood had bolted, Shayne

was sure he had just seen that body for the first time. If Cord had killed the man, he would have made his break long before they reached the scene of the crime.

There would be time to catch Cord later. For now, the detective went over to the body and bent down until he could see the face clearly. Mike Shayne had caught up with the missing Nuttsy Buttsy Dave Tendler.

The punk had been shot three times through the back over the heart and lung area. Shayne raised the body slightly. There was at least one more wound in front. There wasn't much blood on the light gold carpet, although Dave Tendler must have bled profusely. The back of his jacket was soaked with blood which had already dried and turned a rusty brown color.

There was no sign of struggle in the apartment. The place was air conditioned, but the unit wasn't running. In spite of that there was no lingering odor of gunpowder as there would have been if the shots had been fired in that closed space.

The big man made a quick search of the apartment, being careful to leave no fingerprints. There were boxes of fancy-wrapped sugared breakfast food on a shelf in the kitchen, and

the refrigerator held a stack of ready-to-heat T.V. dinners, partly eaten quart containers of four kinds of ice cream, and a quart of milk

The garbage had been emptied and all the beds in the place had been neatly made up.

There was no sign at all of the missing quarter of a million dollars or of the case that had held it.

Mike Shayne did find a framed photo of a striking young blond woman. It was autographed: "All my love to Blackie from his ever-loving Dolly"

Shayne took the picture in his jacket pocket, wiped the doorknob and light switch, and left. He closed and locked the door behind him. What was left of Davy Tendler wouldn't mind being alone a little longer.

VI

MIKE SHAYNE drove south to the office of the Miami News. He guessed rightly that at this hour his good friend the ace feature writer Tim Rourke would be in his cramped and untidy office there writing up his column for the next day.

He waved casually to Carl Dirkson on the City Desk as he went through the big room and on to Rourke's own inner sanctum

The reporter was just finishing up his nightly stint. He was thin and almost emaciated with a long neck, bony shoulders under an expensive dress shirt, a lined face and alert and intelligent black eyes which belied the rest of his appearance.

He jerked a thumb at the only spare chair in the little office and at the bottle of expensive, imported rum on the corner of his desk.

There was nothing to drink the rum from but the bottle or a used paper cup. Mike Shayne chose the bottle and tilted his head back for a long pull at the dark and fiery liquor.

"What's troubling you tonight, maestro?" Tim Rourke asked and took the bottle back. He poured his rum into the used and damp paper cup. "Is it true you made a payoff for my friend Jean Gallo tonight?"

"How did you know?" Mike Shayne asked in return. "Not that I need to ask of course."

"Of course not," Rourke said. "I have friends who talk a lot, and I listen. Mrs. Gallo called the police a couple of hours ago, and our boy called us. We can't get anything out of her, but I understand you made the delivery and pick up."

"You understand right," Mike Shayne said. "Look, Tim, what do you know about the Gallo family that I don't?"

Tim Rourke pushed back his chair and put his feet up on the desk. "That would be Jean Gallo," he said. "She's the family. Runs it anyway. She never would let anybody push her around. Born to the purple you might say—or maybe to the green—she's been richer than any three other people since she was born. You can trust her word though. If she's hired you, she won't lie to you."

"How about the husband?"

"There's a horse of a couple of other colors," Tim Rourke said. "Not purple. Not in the blood, a nothing from noplace, that boy. No green in his background either. He came out of a big city high school to a football scholarship at a small college. Washed out of pro ball early. Lived by his wits and muscle for a few years then till he met Jean Gallo and she went head over heels for him."

"It might not have lasted long there either if he hadn't fathered the little girl. That gave her something to think about beside his lack of culture so she keeps him around as much for the kid's sake as anything else."

"What does he do for a living?" Shayne asked.

"Nothing—," Rourke said. "He fathered the kid. For that he gets his board and keep and pocket money. She could make

him an executive in one of her companies I suppose, but she never has. Maybe she doesn't trust him—he's got no business background. Or maybe he just does not want that kind of job."

"I see," Mike Shayne said.

He drank some more rum. After a moment he took the picture he had brought from Blackie Cord's apartment out of his pocket and tossed it on the desk.

"Ever see this little beauty before?"

"My God yes," Tim Rourke grinned. "That's Dolly Dee. A dancer at some of our clipper clipjoints. I dated her myself a couple of times a while back. Is she in this?"

"I don't know," Mike Shayne said. "Can you think of any reason she might be?"

"I don't rightly know," Tim Rourke said. "It's quite a while now since I dated the little darling—and I don't exactly keep in close touch with old flames. I mean particularly not with one who can give as bad a burn as Dolly Dee. On the other hand it seems to me there is something I ought to remember to tell you about that one."

"Think," Mike Shayne said. "Like the sign on the wall in the Flamingo Bar says—THINK—with a capital M."

"That's about all I'm up to right now, maestro. Maybe I'll sort it out of the memory file later on, and if I do I'll get in touch. Little Dolly has had a real lurid career around this town."

"Do you know where I can find her now?"

"Yes. I can help you there. She's dancing at the Purple Pigeon Club over on the Beach. Matter of fact she's featured in the ad they're running in our entertainment section this week. Should be doing a late show in an hour or so."

"I think I'll take in the show," Mike Shayne said.

"One other thing you oughtta know," Rourke said as Shayne moved toward the door.

"Yeah?" The redhead questioned.

"Petey Painter would like to see you. Something about being a material witness."

Shayne gave Rourke a lopsided grin. "I'll give him a call—sooner or later."

"You do that," the lanky reporter grinned back. "And my regards to Dolly if you see her."

Shayne nodded and left.

The Purple Pigeon Club was in the twentieth street section of Miami Beach just off Collins Avenue and not far from the vast new Convention and Auditorium complex.

Thirty years earlier the area



had been the haunt of some of the toughest mobsters in the country. They had stalked its streets and lined up in its bars in their double-breasted, pin-striped suits and wide brimmed hats, while the tourists gaped and whispered their names in awe.

Those days were long gone, but some of the bars were still tough, and the Purple Pigeon was one of them.

Dolly Dee was between shows so Mike Shayne went on backstage to the cramped and dirty little cubby-hole the management called a dressing room. He knocked. No answer.

"Open up, Dolly," Mike

Shayne said. "I can see the light through the transom."

No sound from within.

"It's an old door," Mike Shayne said. "I can kick it down if I have to—and I will."

"Who are you?" said a woman's tired voice from behind the door.

"I'm not the law," Shayne said. "I'm a friend of Tim Rourke's. I just want to talk to you, Dolly."

There was a long moment of silence followed by vague sliding and shuffling noises inside the room. "Hold on," the voice said. "I'm opening up. No need to bust the door down."

Dolly Dee wasn't nearly as pretty as the picture in Blackie Cord's apartment. Time had dealt hard with her since the years when she had dated Tim Rourke. Still, she was a handsome, full blown, and very sexy blonde. Her dancing tights and lacy black halter showed her figure to its best advantage. Her blondness might have been artificial, but the sex allure wasn't.

She locked the door after the big detective came in and then sat down at the chair by the dressing table. There was no other chair so Mike Shayne sat on an old trunk that probably held her costumes.

The woman went on touching up her stage makeup

"Now you're in here," she said. "Suppose you tell me what you want. Why'd Tim send you?"

"Tim didn't send me," Mike Shayne replied easily. "I just said we were friends. I'm here for another reason." The showgirl's shoulders tensed. The detective had a hunch and decided to play it. "I think you know why I'm here, Dolly."

"You? I never saw you before."

"Sure you did, Dolly baby. You saw me out in the woods earlier tonight when I picked up the little girl."

Dolly Dee jumped as if someone had shot an electric charge through her. Her face and even the muscles of her shoulders and back froze stiff as she tried to keep control.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said huskily. "Who are you anyway, Red? The fuzz? I've done nothin'."

"Come off it," Shayne told her. "You're Blackie Cord's girl. He and Davy Tendler snatched a little girl here on the Beach a couple of days back. They kept her at Blackie's pad on the north side of Miami. You looked after her there for them. Tonight you and Davy took the kid out to an old abandoned house."

He paused, but Dolly just sat

there with her back to him and said nothing.

"I know," Shayne said, pressing his hunch, "because I was the man who brought the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to trade for the kid. It was a woman who left the kid by the house. You. The trade was made. Now who has the money? Blackie? I don't think so, but maybe. I think you have it or know where it is. So do you tell me or the F.B.I.? The snatch is a federal crime."

Still there was a pause. Then Dolly answered. "I don't know anything about a snatch. You gotta believe me, mister. If I did, though—and if it was like you say, mind you I ain't saying it was,—but just if it was,—then me, I'd look for little Davy Tendler. That's who I'd look for if I was you."

"You'd be wasting your time," Mike Shayne said. "Little Davy doesn't have the ransom money. He did, but he sure doesn't now."

"He doesn't?" She sounded genuinely surprised but it might have been put-on. Dolly was an actress of sorts. Not good, but she tried.

"You can guarantee he doesn't."

Out of the corner of his eye Mike Shayne saw a flicker of movement that shouldn't have been there at all. It was only a

flicker, and it took him a moment to find it again and identify what it was.

Someone outside in the hallway was very slowly and quietly turning the knob of the door.

Dolly Dee had locked the door behind Shayne when he came into the room. When the person in the hall realized this, fact the knob, still slowly and without a sound, twisted back to its normal position.

There was a moment's pause and then a small, only partly heard sound, like a metallic click from the other side of the floor.

Mike Shayne was already in motion.

He got Dolly Dee out of the chair and both of them flat on the floor in one swift, fluid motion almost too fast for the eye to follow.

Four shots blasted through the thin upper panel of the door so fast they sounded almost like a drum tap. The first two shattered the mirror in front of which Dolly Dee had been sitting. The last two passed near where Shayne had been.

There was a sound of running footsteps in the hall.

Dolly finally started to scream, but Mike Shayne got a big hand clamped over her mouth and cut off the noise.

"Don't yell. He's gone now."

In a moment he could feel her relax, and was able to take his hand away.

She said: "Thanks, mister. I guess you saved my life for sure that time. Who was it?"

"My guess, your friend Blackie Cord," Mike Shayne said.

Her eyes widened and flicked to the other door in the room. "Not Blackie. He's..." Then she caught herself.

Mike Shayne was up off the floor and got the door open in a split second. It led to a lavatory that went with the dressing room.

If Blackie Cord had been in there listening to the conversation, he wasn't there any more. The lavatory had a window opening out on an alley behind the building. The window was unlocked and unscreened. Anyone could get in or out by that way if he wanted.

Cord could have been listening to Shayne talk and then climbed out the window, gone around into the hallway and fired through the door. On the other hand, he wouldn't go to that trouble when all he had to do was crack open the lavatory door and he could see clearly to aim at his targets.

More likely, Shayne decided quickly, Cord had been hiding in there, taking off when the shooting started without even waiting to learn the fate of his

girlfriend. That sort of thing would fit with what Mike Shayne knew of Cord's character.

The big detective closed and locked the lavatory window before he went back into the dressing room.

It fitted the sort of place the Purple Pigeon was that no one had heard the shots—or if they had, they hadn't bothered to come and investigate.

Dolly Dee was still sitting on the floor where he had left her.

"Maybe you'll believe me now," Mike Shayne said. "You level with me and I think I can keep you alive."

"I believe you," she said. "I sure do believe you now!"

"Okay then," Shayne said. "We better get out of here. Don't even tell your boss you're going. We'll use the back way through the alley. Get your coat and purse."

Dolly Dee looked at the bullet holes in the door. "Let's go, big man. Wherever you say." She grabbed a shabby purse, and a rabbit fur coat. She was sliding into the coat as she moved toward the back door.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE got the woman into his car and headed back across the Causeway to Miami.

"We'll go to my place,"

Shayne said and she didn't question his statement.

Mike Shayne's apartment was in an older apartment hotel near the mouth of the Miami River. As they entered after leaving the self-service elevator, Dolly could see the phone on a table directly across from the door. On the left of the phone was Shayne's favorite easy chair and a liquor cabinet. Beyond were the doors to the kitchenette and bath. To the right of the living room was the entrance to the big detective's bedroom.

Shayne tossed his hat on the hatrack to the right of the door and went over and mixed Dolly a rum and coke as she huddled into a chair. He fixed himself a glass of brandy.

"Okay now," he said, "I was right about the snatch, wasn't I?"

"Partly," Dolly said. "I knew Blackie and Davy Tendler were in on something Blackie thought was pretty big. That much I do know. For the last couple of weeks they were sure together a lot. I haven't seen either of them since early this morning—I guess I mean yesterday morning. But that's all. I swear that's so."

"You were the woman brought the kid to the trade spot tonight," Mike Shayne said. "You aren't denying that."

"You can bet your left hind foot I'm denying it," she snapped. "If a kid was snatched I never saw her. Besides I ate dinner over at the Purple Pigeon tonight about seven o'clock and was at the bar from then till time to get ready for my first show. Lots of people saw me there. Which reminds me—have you got a pair of slacks and a shirt I can put on over these dancing tights?"

Mike Shayne went into the bedroom and returned with a pair of walking shorts and a shirt. The shorts were big enough to go twice around her waist. He gave her one of his neckties to use as an impromptu belt. She went into the bedroom to change.

He was glad for the time to think as she dressed. He was almost positive now that the second kidnapper at the old house was a woman—and the most likely woman was Dolly Dee.

Yet, she wouldn't have given the Purple Pigeon bar as an alibi unless it was true. It would be too easy to check and if the woman wasn't Dolly Dee, how much did the dancer really know? That she was holding back on him, Shayne was certain.

"Let's go back over this again," he told her when she emerged. "You weren't keeping

the Gallo kid that Blackie and Dave snatched?"

"No, I sure wasn't." She sat down across from Shayne and lit a cigarette from the pack the detective kept by the couch.

"You didn't bring the kid out to deliver to me tonight?" Shayne pressed.

"I told you. Listen, mister, if I'd been in on the pickup of any two hundred and fifty grand tonight I'd be long gone with my cut. You can bet on that. You sure wouldn't have found me getting ready to do another show at the Pigeon."

Mike Shayne took another tack. "What do you know about the deal Blackie and Davy were in on?"

"Not very much Blackie never told me details of his capers. All I know is he seemed to think it was a real big deal for sure." Dolly took a nervous drag on her cigarette, then stubbed the half smoked butt out in the ashtray.

"The biggest deal Blackie had planned?"

"Blackie nothing," Dolly said. "He didn't plan it. It was Davy Tandler's caper. He come to Blackie with the deal. Davy was in charge."

Mike Shayne kept a poker face. He didn't want the woman to see how much her statement had surprised him. It went completely against his own idea

of what had actually happened.

"And you don't have anything more to say?" he asked at last.

"You can bet on that, mister."

Mike Shayne looked at her grimly. "Somebody thinks you know something important enough to him so he tried to kill you tonight."

Her face paled under the smeared makeup.

"If Blackie is on the run," Shayne said, "Where would he go?"

Dolly gave him the address of the apartment where Tandler lay dead at the moment, and the names of a couple of bars, including the Golden Rooster. That was all.

Mike Shayne knew there wasn't much use searching those spots that same night Blackie Cord would naturally avoid his apartment, and would likely stay clear of any of his known haunts. Besides the big man needed rest. Even three or four hours sleep now would pay off in added strength and alertness the next day.

He also wanted Dolly Dee to have time to think. A nervous night of waiting might convince her to tell him whatever it was she was holding back. But he didn't want to take her to Lucy Hamilton's place as long as Lolita Tandler was there. For

the time, he wanted the two women kept apart.

In the end he put Dolly Dee on his bed, pulled the couch in front of the bedroom door so she couldn't sneak out without alerting him, lay down on the couch and within minutes went to sleep.

It was only a few hours till dawn, and Mike Shayne slept soundly. He woke with the first greying of the sky.

His first move was to call down to his friend Joe at the desk in the lobby. "Call around and get me a medium size woman's dress or pants suit. Maybe you can get one from one of the maids or a waitress down at the diner or borrow one from your wife. About a size fourteen. I don't care how you get it so long as it's up here in half an hour."

If Joe was surprised by the request, he kept his feelings to himself.

Mike Shayne fixed a breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, toast and coffee, and woke Dolly Dee. He put a good stiff slug of brandy into the coffee. Dolly didn't look as if she had slept at all.

While they were eating, Joe knocked discreetly at the door. Shayne cracked it open only enough to take in the package the attendant had brought and pass out a twenty dollar bill.



"That enough?" the detective asked.

"Plenty!" he responded. "That's my wife's old outfit. For twenty, you don't need to return it. Only cost ten bucks new."

Shayne nodded: "Good," he said, closing the door.

"You can put this on." He turned to Dolly Dee, handing her the package. "I've got to go see some people. Then I'm going to try and find Blackie again. I'm going to leave you here—and I'm telling you you had better stay. Don't answer the phone or the door. Of course you can leave if you want, but this will be the safest spot in town for you."

"Whoever tried to kill you last night," Mike Shayne con-

tinued, "will keep trying. Your usual hangouts will be watched. Blackie was mixed up in a real dangerous deal this time. You were Blackie's girl."

He paused to finish his coffee. "I didn't tell you last night, but Davy Tendler's dead. By now Blackie might be, too. If he isn't, I want to find him in time to keep him alive. Now can you think where he might be?"

"You really think Blackie's in danger?"

"If he wasn't the one who fired into your dressing room last night, I know he's in danger. There's two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash floating around somewhere. That's not hay—and whoever is after it is playing for keeps."

Shayne could see that Dolly was thinking hard. He didn't press her.

Finally she made up her mind.

"Blackie's got an old maid aunt lives somewhere around North West Third Street and Twelfth Avenue. I have never been there. If he was real scared, he might go there. Her name's Millie, Millie Cord."

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE found Miss Cord's address in the phone book.

The house was only a few

minutes drive from his apartment so he drove there first after getting his car out of the parking lot.

Turning into the block, Shayne realized something was wrong. There were two police patrol cars and an ambulance parked in front of the house he was headed for. As the detective pulled his car to the curb a little way down the block the two white-coated ambulance attendants carried out a shrouded body on a stretcher.

Mike Shayne got out and crossed the street. He recognized one of the plainclothes detectives on the porch of the house as Len Sturgis, able assistant to Shayne's longtime friend Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry.

Sturgis spotted Shayne at once and waved him over. "What brings you around, Mike? This got anything to do with one of your cases?" Obviously, Sturgis didn't know that Painter was looking for Shayne. The detective was glad to let Sturgis remain ignorant of the fact.

"I don't even know what this is about," Mike Shayne hedged. "I was just driving by and saw the crowd...but since I'm here, what happened? Who's that on the stretcher?"

"Except that it's murder we don't really know what did

happen," Sturgis said. "The body was Miss Millie Cord. She's lived here since any of the neighbors can remember. Sometime last night somebody pumped three slugs into her chest and left her dead on the living room floor. Nobody saw or heard a thing. This morning her next door neighbor noticed the front door standing wide open and called us."

"Robbery?" Shayne asked, somewhat casually.

"I suppose so," Sturgis said taking off his hat and mopping his balding brow. "Funny thing—the place had been pretty well ripped up and searched but the usual things a thief would take like a color T.V. are still in there. Your usual thief would likely split out after a killing. This one didn't. . . ."

"Stayed because he was looking for something special?" Mike Shayne hazarded.

"We won't know for sure unless we catch him," Sturgis said, "but just offhand that's the way it looks. One thing more—there's a trail of blood out the back door like a wounded man had left that way. Could have been our thief of course—but in that case who wounded him? Not the old woman. She didn't even own a gun."

"You got a real puzzle here,"

Mike Shayne said. "I wish you the best of luck with it, Len."

Leaving Millie Cord's house, Shayne started for the causeway to Miami Beach. He hadn't gone in to look through the murder house. It was a sure thing Blackie Cord wasn't in there after a police search—and the big redhead didn't want to attract attention by showing an undue interest in the case.

He was relieved that Painter hadn't, apparently, put out a bulletin to pick Shayne up. He didn't want to waste time explaining right now.

It was only mid-morning, so Shayne used the radio phone in his car to call the Gallo home. A maid answered, and when he identified himself, told Shayne to hold on.

A few minutes later he heard Jean Gallo's voice on the other end of the line.

"I'm taking this call from bed, Mr. Shayne," she said. "I've left word I'd take a call from you any time of day or night."

He said: "I appreciate that. Some pretty important things have come up that I'd like to talk to you about in person. I'm on my way over now, if that's okay with you."

"I'll be dressed by the time you get here," she said. "We can have coffee and rolls together on the patio."

It took Shayne only twenty minutes to drive through the light mid-morning traffic to the Gallo home. The maid showed him to the back of the house and the patio.

A large area behind the big Gallo mansion was stone flagged and shaded by the spreading limbs of big old avocado, mango and star apple trees. It was one of the most formal patios Mike Shayne had seen.

A table had been set with a steaming coffee pot and plates of rolls and butter and sliced tropical fruits. In spite of the fact that he had already breakfasted, the detective couldn't resist heaping his plate.

"Let's get right to the point," Mrs. Gallo said as he served himself. "It's what I always like to do. How much progress have you made?"

"I'll be equally frank with you," the big redheaded detective told her. "One of the kidnappers is dead and another may be. He's certainly wounded."

"Good Lord," Jean Gallo said flatly, her eyebrows lifting. "Have you been doing the killing?"

"No I haven't—and I'm not sure who has. I know now there were at least three people involved. The man who received the money from me is the one who is dead. He was killed for

the money—but I don't think the killer got it from him because there's been one attempted and another successful killing since then. I believe the killer is still looking for the ransom money. Until he finds it, he will be very dangerous. He's already proved that he will stop at nothing."

"This really is terrible," she said. "And you? Are you in danger yet?"

"I was almost one of the victims of the unsuccessful attempt, but you can see I wasn't even scratched."

"I didn't realize it was this sort of thing. . . To kidnap is one thing, but to go about killing people! The kidnapper who spoke to me on the phone didn't sound that sort at all. Rather a soft spoken, mild mannered voice."

"You can't ever tell," Mike Shayne said. "By the way, is your husband at home? I'd like to talk to him if he is."

"He'll be down any minute," Jean Gallo told him. "Teddy was out very late last night, but I had him wakened as soon as I knew you were on your way over. He'd want to hear what you had found out."

Even as she spoke they saw Teddy Gallo coming across the lawn from around the side of the house. Little Jeannie was with her father, holding his

hand and trotting along on her short legs to keep up with him. Her golden curls sparkled in the early morning sunshine.

"A lovely picture," Jean Gallo said. "Teddy and his greatest of all gifts to me."

A moment later the two were seated about the breakfast table. A servant brought the little girl a bowl of cereal and a glass of milk.

"Mr. Shayne has been making some progress, Teddy," the woman said. "I'll let him tell you about it himself."

Mike Shayne chose his words carefully. "I know at least two of the people involved in the kidnapping of your daughter. Both of them are locals—small time hoods. Apparently there's been a falling out over the disposition of the ransom money. One of the men is dead. So is an innocent third party. The second may be dead too. I can't be sure as yet. There is also at least one other person involved—maybe a woman, maybe a man. I don't know for sure yet. But I have a good suspect."

"All right then," Teddy Gallo said, "can you tell us who you suspect?"

"Not right now," Mike Shayne said with decision. "You'd have to inform the police, and I'm not quite ready for them yet. As it is, I expect

Chief Painter's men are riding my tail—or not far behind. I'm taking it on myself to hold this info back for the present. When I have to, I'll tell Painter. Not before."

"But..." Teddy Gallo started to say.

"But nothing, Teddy," his wife cut him off. "Mr. Shayne is capable. I hired him to be in full charge of this case, and I trust him to do it his way. He's the professional you know." She turned to Shayne. "What we don't know, we don't report."

"Thank you," Mike Shayne said. "Now one more thing. It's unlikely, but has your daughter said anything that might help us?"

"I'm sorry—no," Jean Gallo said. "Apparently they treated her kindly enough, but she was blindfolded most of the time. I had our doctor examine her last night, and he thinks she must have been under some mild sedation also. All she's been able to tell us so far is; 'men—big men.' Not much to go on I'm afraid."

"Men—big men," the child said, looking up from her bowl of cereal. "And nurseey too."

"Good Lord," Jean Gallo said. "That's the first mention she's made of a woman. What makes you call her 'nurseey', dear?"

"She fed me. Put me to bed, just like nurseey."

Mike Shayne leaned forward and said kindly. "Would you know nurse if you saw her again, honey?"

"No," the child said.

"Are you sure, baby?" Teddy Gallo asked. "Are you real sure?"

"Yes," the little girl said and went back to eating her bowl of cereal and cream.

"That you can tell the cops," Shayne said, standing up.

IX

MIKE SHAYNE drove straight back to his own apartment from the Gallo house. He wanted to see Dolly Dee if she was still there.

She was.

"I'm not about to run out on you, Big Boy," she told him. "It's on the radio and T.V. about Blackie's aunt being murdered. Do you think he did it, Shayne?"

"I don't know," Mike Shayne said. "It could have been a burglar, but I don't think it was. I think Blackie went to stay with her last night just like you figured he would. I think somebody tracked him there, surprised the aunt and shot her. Blackie heard the shots and made a break for it. He got away, but only after the killer winged him. There's a trail of blood out the back way.

The killer tore the place apart—but I don't think he got what he wanted."

"And what was that?"

"Come off it, Dolly. You know perfectly well what he was after. It has to be the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars ransom money."

"A real killer," Dolly Dee said. "Well, I haven't the money, and I don't want to get killed. I'll stay right here. The food and liquor are both good, and I don't think anybody can find me here."

"That's fine," Mike Shayne said. "By the way, we've got one real clue by now. The kidnappers kept a mask on the little girl, but it wasn't a very good mask. I think she can finger them if we show them to her again. And she saw the woman."

"That's fine," Dolly Dee said, and reached for the gin bottle in Shayne's bar. "Anyway she won't finger me. I never saw that kid or had anything to do with the snatch."

"Then you've got nothing to worry about," Mike Shayne said. "Nothing at all."

The phone rang. Mike Shayne picked up the instrument and grunted into the mouthpiece.

"That you Mike?" said the acidulous voice of Tim Rourke. "I just remembered."

"It's me," Mike Shayne said.
"Just remembered what?"

"What I was trying to think of that might tie Dolly Dee into your case. A few years back it was an item around town that she and Teddy Gallo were dating when Jean wasn't looking. I never saw them together myself, but some of my pigeons remarked about it."

"Interesting," Shayne said.

"I thought you'd enjoy it," Tim Rourke said. "Incidentally, the police have the remains of the late Davy Tendler. The apartments in an uptown apartment building have maid service. The maid got a real shock when she went into one of them to clean this morning. The place belongs to Blackie Cord."

"Uhhuh."

"You don't sound very surprised."

"If somebody turns up two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash, you call me and I'll sound surprised," Shayne said. "But thanks for calling about the girl. It may help a lot."

He put the phone back in its cradle.

"I've got a news bulletin for you, Dolly," he said. "Davy Tendler's been shot to death. They found him on the floor of Blackie Cord's apartment this morning. That means by now



the cops are looking for you as well as whoever killed Davy."

He could see her face whiten.

"Now will you tell me where Blackie's hiding?"

"I don't know, Shayne," she said. "I swear to God I don't know."

"Well, if you don't, I'm going to have to find him some other way," Mike Shayne said. "You stay here. If I find Blackie, and he's still alive, I'll let you know."

"Don't break your neck doing me favors," she said, as Shayne left the apartment.

The detective got his car out of the building parking lot. He drove only two blocks, so that he was out of sight of the building, and then parked.

He walked back to a spot where he could watch his own building without being seen himself.

Five minutes later his wait was rewarded.

Dolly Dee came out the side door to the building carrying her rabbit fur and her purse. The woman walked rapidly over to Brickel Avenue and took a seat on a bus bench.

Mike Shayne went and got his car and parked a ways down the block where he could see her. She looked around nervously several times, but failed to spot him. Soon a north bound bus came by and Dolly Dee got on.

Mike Shayne followed the bus on its route across the river and then on up Biscayne Boulevard. At North East 31st Street Dolly Dee got off the bus and walked east towards the Bay.

She went east for a block and a half and then turned into an alleyway between two large, old frame houses. Once they had been the homes of wealthy winter residents of Miami. Now, the big detective knew, they had been cut up into a number of cheap apartments.

Dolly Dee used a key to let herself into a ground floor apartment at the rear of the largest of the buildings.

Mike Shayne moved down the alleyway after the woman and posted himself under one of the windows of the apartment she had entered. He heard her voice talking to someone inside.

"So I figured you'd hole up here. . ." she was saying.

"You can bet your luck I'd come here," a man's voice said. "Where else could I go? Aunt Millie got shot."

Mike Shayne knew that voice. It belonged to Blackie Cord. Moving to the door Shayne took his ring of lock picks and pass keys and made short work of opening the old lock.

"Good morning all," he said and stepped inside.

It was a small, one-room-and-bath efficiency apartment converted from what had originally been a bedroom of the big old house. There was a sink, an apartment sized refrigerator, and a two burner electric stove against one wall.

Blackie Cord was on the single bed. He was pale and weak looking and had torn up a sheet to make a bandage and sling for his left arm and shoulder. The improvised dressings had soaked up a lot of blood. There was a revolver on

a chair along side of the bed, but Blackie Cord made no move to reach for it.

Dolly Dee was standing about three feet from the bed.

"Now that we're all here together," Shayne said, "maybe you two lovebirds will give me some straight-answers for once. For starters—who shot you, Blackie?"

"I don't know."

"This is the worst case I ever had for nobody knowing anything about anything," Mike Shayne said. "The guy shot you. Didn't you even see him?"

"No I didn't. I was asleep in the back room in my clothes—all but my shoes. I hadn't been there more than an hour or-so. Aunt Millie must have surprised him in the front rooms. She always was a light sleeper. I grabbed my shoes to get out the window. Whoever it was opened the door to the bedroom. It was dark in there so all I could see was he was a big one. He ran into the room and I got past him when he was still looking at the bed and I cut for the back door. He took a shot at me as I ran and winged me. I didn't know where else to go, so I came up here to Dolly's pad where she stays when she's not with me."

"I hear tell there was a big dark man looking for you on the Beach last night," Mike

Shayne said. "Could it be the same one?"

"How the hell do I know?"

Blackie snorted. "The one who shot at me was big. That's all I know. I told you it was dark."

"Was it you shot at Dolly over in the Pigeon-last night?"

"No! I wouldn't shoot at her."

"Not even for a quarter of a million dollars?"

"I don't know anything about a quarter of a million."

"That's not the way it's going to be," Mike Shayne told them both with a ring of authority in his voice. "In about five minutes I'm going to call Will Gentry to send a crew up here and come take you in custody. You've been hit hard and lost a lot of blood, Blackie. You need a doctor—or else."

"Besides the cops found Davy Tendler dead in your pad this morning. There's sure to be an A.P.B. out for you. Once they have you, you won't be able to do any more hunting for that money."

Blackie Cord was looking at his gun on the chair.

Mike Shayne walked over and picked it up.

"You'd never have made it Blackie, even if you hadn't been shot. Now listen. You level with me and at least whoever killed Nuttsy-buttsy Davy and tried to kill you, won't get the money. Once I turn it back

to Mrs. Gallo he won't have any reason to kill you either.

"If you don't tell me, he might still get to you—even in a hospital. It's a case of talk and save your own neck or clam up and have a killer still after you."

Cord remained stubbornly silent. Dolly Dee broke the stillness. "He makes sense, Blackie. You're hit real bad. We can't run from here. What do you say?"

"Okay Shayne," Cord said "Ask your questions."

"First—tell me about the Gallo snatch."

"It was Davy Tendler's caper. He come to me with the idea about a month back. First off, I didn't buy. But Davy was real convincing. He said he knew a lot about these people and they'd pay right up. They had plenty of money and loved the kid. He sold me."

"So?"

"So we grabbed the kid off her front lawn. We kept her at my place. Davy said he had a new wife who wouldn't go for the caper so we'd have to use my pad."

"And Dolly looked after her there?" Shayne asked.

"I don't know who looked after her. I stayed away from the place in case Davy was wrong and the cops came busting in. He set up the payoff."

"What did he do with the money?"

"If I knew do you think I'd be lying here singing like a canary?" Blackie Cord's tone was scornful. "He was supposed to trade the kid for the cash. Then in an hour or two when he was sure he wasn't being tailed, he was to either come by the Golden Rooster where you picked me up, or phone me there and tell me where to meet him."

"Like you know he never showed or called. Instead we find him cold fish on the floor of my pad. That wasn't in the script, Shayne. It sure to God wasn't."

"I almost believe you," Mike Shayne said.

"You better to God believe me. You're the nearest thing I have for an alibi. You and those cruds at the Rooster who know I was there when Davy was done in."

"What about the money?"

"I don't know about that money except you say you gave it to Davy Tendler. I never saw it. I don't know where it is."

"Somebody thinks you do," Mike Shayne said. "He killed your Aunt Millie and tried to kill you and me and Dolly here. He means to get it. Who is he?"

"I don't know."

Mike Shayne couldn't budge either of them on that point and Blackie Cord was getting

weaker fast from his wound. The big detective finally called his friend Will Gentry at Miami Police Headquarters.

X

AN AMBULANCE and a prowler car with two uniformed cops were at the apartment building within ten minutes. Shortly after that the big black prowler car which Will Gentry used drove into the street. Len Sturgis was at the wheel and the Chief beside him in the front street.

"You sure get around, Shayne," was Sturgis' greeting. "So it wasn't any accident you showing up this morning."

"What makes you think like that?"

"It may be a wild notion," Sturgis said, "but we know now that the old woman who was killed was Cord's aunt. I'd say that was quite a coincidence."

"I wouldn't," Gentry said. "I'd say it was Mike working a case and keeping quiet about it as usual. What's the connection, Mike?"

"I didn't say I was on a case."

"You didn't happen to mention the Gallo snatch either—or a connection between the dead woman and the body of Dave Tendler in Blackie's pad. We aren't exactly blind, deaf and dumb down at headquarters,

pal. And Painter wants to see you. There's no A.P.B. out on you. Mrs. Gallo put in a few good words for you. But you ought to call Painter. And I suggest pronto."

The redhead gave a lopsided grin. So Mrs. Gallo was the reason Painter wasn't pressing Shayne right now. The society-conscious little Chief would listen to the Gallo money. Even so, Shayne knew he didn't have much time. "I'll call Petey," he said.

"You do that," Gentry growled. "And you check in at headquarters within two hours. I'm not hauling you in—yet. But as soon as I have a long talk with your friends, I'll want to talk to you."

"Can you make that four hours, Will?" Shayne asked.

"I'll think about it," Will Gentry said, shifting the cigar in his mouth. "But don't push it."

Shayne lifted his hand in a semi-salute. Gentry grunted, and turned to watch the ambulance crew loading Cord. Pointing to one of the junior officers, the Chief bellowed, "You there, ride with the ambulance. Cord's wanted for questioning, and I want a man with him till I get to the hospital." Turning to the subdued and worried looking Dolly Dee, the Chief's face didn't soften. "You'll be

riding with us," he said. Dolly Dee nodded.

By that time, Shayne had reached his car. He drove south along the Boulevard to Lucy Hamilton's apartment. She was waiting for him when he got there, and so was Lolita Tandler.

The redhead could see at a glance that the woman had heard the news reports of her husband's death. She was red-eyed from weeping.

"Oh, Mr. Shayne," she said. "What in God's name was my poor Davy mixed up with? Who would want to kill him like that? Was it that awful Blackie Cord?"

She had changed to a clean slack suit and tied her long blond hair back with a broad ribbon. She looked young and helpless and very sad. Shayne couldn't help feeling sorry for her, though as usual he tried not to show any emotion.

"It looks as though Davy and Blackie had been mixed up in kidnapping a child on the Beach," he told her. "Your husband is the last person known to have the ransom money. Somebody must have killed him for that. We aren't sure who did that. It might have been Blackie Cord, or it might not. We honestly aren't sure about that as yet."

She said: "How awful!" and

they could see that she was close to breaking into tears again.

"How awful!" Lolita repeated. "I never would suspect Dave of being mixed up in that sort of thing. Kidnapping a child? Dave was so kind and gentle. I'm sure that if he did anything like that, he wouldn't hurt the little girl. He'd be kind to anyone like he was to me."

"I'm sure that he would be, dear," Lucy Hamilton said. "Don't you worry about that now."

"Don't worry about anything right now," Mike Shayne said firmly. "I want you and Lucy to stay right here in this apartment. Don't go out for anything. Angel, you keep the door locked. There's a killer on the loose, and until we nail him nobody is safe. He killed Dave Tandler, and I think he also killed Blackie Cord's aunt and wounded Blackie. We don't know who he'll go for next. I want both of you safe out of sight where only I know where you are."

Lucy Hamilton just said: "Of course, Michael."

Lolita Tandler looked even more frightened. "Don't you know who is doing all the killing and why? Why should we be in danger?"

"The killer is after the money. He may have other mo

tives, too, but until he finds the money, he may come after you, figuring Davy might have told you where it was. So stay put."

"But I don't know anything" Lolita protested.

"The killer doesn't know that," Shayne answered firmly

Before he left, Shayne had another word aside with Lucy Hamilton. "I'm beginning to have a fairly good notion who I'm after, Angel," he told her. "From now on, every move I make is going to be aimed at smoking him out in the open. That's why I want you to be so careful. Don't open up for anybody but me or Tim Rourke or Will Gentry. If the phone rings, pick it up but don't answer unless I start talking first."

"You really are worried, Michael," she said. "It's that bad?"

"He's smart and tough and absolutely ruthless," Shayne said. "In his case I'd probably be the same. As it is I've got one real advantage. He's on the wrong side of the law. He's got to go further and further in, and sooner or later I'll hit his weak spot. He has to keep coming at me now till I do."

Leaving Lucy Hamilton's, Mike Shayne drove back over to the Beach to the Gallo home. Both Jean and Teddy Gallo were waiting for him there.

"Things are coming to a head

in this case," the big redhead told them

"That's splendid," Jean Gallo said

"One thing I have to explain," Mike Shayne said. "The police are in the case in full now"



"The money?" Jean Gallo asked. "Have you located all that money yet?"

"I think I have," Mike Shayne said. At their start of surprise he held up one big hand. "Wait a minute. I don't actually have the money yet—but I believe I know who does. If I'm right, the money's safe enough where it is for the next few hours."

"Are you sure?" Teddy Gallo asked.

"I'm sure. There's one thing that has to be done first. And not much time for it. It's very important, so I hope you two won't object."

"Why should we?" Jean Gallo asked. "I mean of course we won't object if it will help clear up this whole mess. Just tell us what it is."

"I want your daughter to see two people who were arrested a little while ago in Miami. You remember she said she saw the woman who was caring for her. The police in Miami have a woman who might be the one. Call Will Gentry. Tell him about your daughter having seen the female kidnapper. He'll arrange things from that point."

"Hold on a minute," Teddy Gallo protested. "Jeannie is just a child. Does she have to be dragged into a police court? And what about the publicity? You know we wanted this all kept quiet."

"It will be kept quiet," Mike Shayne said. "Chief Gentry is a friend of mine. There won't be any reporters or photographers to bother your child. She can see the people in the Chief's own office. Privately. We have to know if the child can identify them though. That's especially important in the case of the woman."

"Who are these people?" Teddy Gallo demanded.

"The man is the hoodlum Blackie Cord who was one of the kidnappers. The woman is his mistress," Shayne said.

"Her stage name is Dolly Dee."

As he said the name, the detective was watching Teddy Gallo. If he expected to see the man start or change color, he was dissatisfied. As far as Gallo was concerned, Shayne might as well have said Sally Smith or Ruby Kahn. If the man recalled his former girl friend, he revealed nothing.

"Let the child see them then," Gallo said with all the objection gone from his tone. "You take her over whenever the Chief wants to see her, darling."

"Why don't you take her?" Jean Gallo asked.

"She'll be more calm with you," Gallo responded petulantly.

Shayne left them without saying goodbye.

XI

FOR THE SECOND time that day Mike Shayne crossed to Miami, returning to Lucy Hamilton's apartment. Already, an hour and a half had passed since Gentry's deadline. Shayne hoped the Gallo's call would give him more time before Gentry missed Shayne and put out an A.P.B. on him. About half way across the Causeway, the detective realized that he was being followed. The car was not a conspicuous one, and whoever

was driving knew his business. He never got close enough to let the big man get a good enough look to identify him.

Big Mike Shayne grinned. Once on the Miami side of Biscayne Bay he made a half-hearted attempt to shake off his follower. His failure to do so easily convinced him of the tail's professional ability.

The redhead took an indirect route to Lucy Hamilton's place. The following car dropped way back.

Shayne parked and went up to the apartment. He knocked loudly and called out so that Lucy would recognize his voice. She unlocked the door and let him in.

Lucy Hamilton and Lolita Tandler were both in the front room. Lolita had been drinking from a bottle of brandy that Lucy kept mostly for Shayne's use. She had a highball glass in her hand with ice cubes, soda and brandy. The combination made Mike Shayne shudder.

Lolita wasn't drunk though. She apparently had just enough to keep up her courage.

Lucy Hamilton had been drinking strong black coffee.

Mike Shayne poured himself a cup of the coffee and laced it liberally with brandy.

His brown haired secretary waited until he was seated and had downed some of the coffee

royale before she said: "I didn't expect you back so soon, Michael."

"She did," Shayne said and nodded at Lolita. "At least she was afraid I'd be back. That's why she needed that drink."

Lolita Tandler said: "I don't know what you mean," but she took a big swallow of the brandy and soda.

"Sure you do, honey," Shayne said. "Sure you do. You knew sooner or later I'd be back asking you to take me to the money."

"I don't know anything about any money."

"Oh, yes you do. I'm talking about the two hundred and fifty thousand dollar ransom for the little Gallo girl. You have it. You had it all the time while people were getting shot up and killed over it."

"You're a liar," Lolita slurred. "Miss Hamilton, he's a liar or gone crazy."

"Lucy knows me better than that," Mike Shayne said. "You were the woman who brought the kid out to the pickup point. You had to be. The little girl saw a woman who was minding her in Blackie's pad. She can identify that woman."

"Oh, no!"

"There are only two women it could have been," Mike Shayne continued. "Only two women close enough to Blackie and

Davy to be trusted by them. One is Blackie's girl, Dolly Dee. The police have Dolly now and Mrs. Gallo is taking the kid over to look at her. She won't identify her."

"How do you know that?" Lolita Tendler asked, alert now. "Blackie was in this thing with Davy. Dolly is Blackie's girl."

"The kid won't identify her because she isn't the woman," Mike Shayne said directly to Lolita. "You are, honey. You know it, and I know it. You and Davy turned over the kid to me. I left the money for Davy. You and he took it back to Blackie's pad where you three were supposed to split it up."

"Only you got greedy, honey. You decided to double-cross both men and keep all that money for yourself. I mean where else would a girl like you get your hands on a quarter of a million dollars?"

Lucy Hamilton was watching Shayne closely. This wasn't the way he usually spoke to a woman. Rough as he was, the big man had a chivalry all his own. Still, his beautiful secretary kept her peace.

"You got greedy, Lolita. You shot Davy and took the money and hid it out someplace. Then you came here, figuring to use Lucy for an alibi. You didn't

know I'd been hired by the Gallos. Or maybe you did. Maybe you and Davy recognized me at the old house and you figured Lucy would be an even better alibi in that case. That's the way it was, wasn't it?"

"No," she screamed at him. "No, no, no, it wasn't. Betty Jane sent me here. I never knew nothing. I never killed Davy. I loved him. We were just married a little while before he died."

"Maybe you married him for this deal," Shayne said. "I don't know and I don't care."

"I never killed anybody."

"If I turn you over to Will Gentry and tell him all I know, do you think the cops will believe you for a minute? And if they do believe you, if they let you go, you're as good as dead—and you know it."

"You wouldn't turn me in. That's why I came to you. You're Mike Shayne."

Shayne decided to play his hunch all the way. Counting on the girl's greed, he continued in a sure but sly voice: "Don't count on it. A quarter of a million is a lot of money to me, too, sister. You better believe that and not forget it for one minute, if you want to stay alive."

"What do you mean by that?" Lolita had already guessed what he meant. Her face was chalk white.

"I mean I'm not going to turn you in unless I have to," Mike Shayne said. "You lead me to that two hundred and fifty thousand, and you can walk away free. I might even give you three, five G's for traveling money. You see?"

"And if I don't lead you to it?"

"You will," Shayne said. "You can decide between the easy way and the hard way—but you'll take me to it. Only if it's the hard way, you might not walk away. Easy enough to kill you and blame it on whoever has done the other killings in this case. Who'd know the difference?"

Her eyes widened. "Was it you did those killings? Did you kill Davy too?"

Shayne just looked at her without answering—but from that moment on he knew that the woman was in deadly fear of him.

"Come on," he said. "Tell me about the money."

Her lips trembled. "Okay, okay. I was in on the deal with Davy. It was such a lot of money. I never really had any money. I never saw so much money in my life."

"Get to the point," Shayne said.

"I took care of the kid after they snatched her. We used Blackie's pad, but we kept



Dolly out of it. We figured she'd be the one they'd suspect if anyone caught on later—and she could set up an alibi.

"I took the kid out to the old house with Davy last night. You're right. He recognized you, but he didn't think you knew him. How did you?" When Shayne didn't answer, Lolita went on, nervously. "Davy knew you knew Betty Jane. So he had me call her, to get your address, or some way to reach you. B.J. said to try your secretary, Lucy Hamilton. She gave us the number. Before I called Lucy here we went to Blackie's. On the way we stashed most of the money. Blackie was only supposed to get twenty thousand dollars. Dave had that to give him."

"It wasn't on him when I found the body," Shayne said.

"Davy had it! I swear, he took it up to the apartment! He was going to call Blackie to come get it. He left me in the car. I was supposed to park it a few blocks off where it wouldn't be noticed and walk back. Only I didn't drive right off. I was having trouble finding a match to light a cigarette. I was pawing through the glove compartment when I saw the lights go on in Blackie's pad. Then I heard shots. I was scared. I got out of there."

"The ever-loving wife," Shayne said. "Suppose it was Davy did the shooting and he needed a getaway car?"

"Davy never carried a gun," she said. "I thought it was Blackie waited for him and shot him. I was scared he'd come for me next. All I could think was I should go ahead and call you—I came over here. I . . . I thought maybe you could get Davy's killer." Miserably—"I thought this was a safe place."

"It was," Shayne said. "It probably saved your life. The killer couldn't guess you were here. Now let's get down to the real thing, honey. Where did you put the money?"

"I didn't mean to get mixed up in a kidnapping," Lolita said. "Davy didn't tell me till he had the kid. What's going to

happen to me now? Will you help me get away? Blackie'll kill me sure, now."

"No, he won't. The police have Blackie and Dolly. They don't need you. But Blackie didn't kill Davy. So you're still in danger. The killer wants that money. Bad. Tell me where it is, and I'll do what I can to help you."

Lolita reached a decision. The only sensible decision she could reach. "We hid it out by the old house before we left there. I'll have to show you. You take me there. I wanted the money but not all this killing and being afraid of being killed. The money isn't worth that."

"Too bad you and Davy didn't decide that before you got into this," Mike Shayne said. "Okay, let's go."

XII

IT WAS growing dark as Mike Shayne and Lolita drove through the heavy early evening traffic. By the time they reached the old house in the North West it would be night again.

As he drove, Shayne watched for the car which had tailed him from the Beach to Lucy Hamilton's. Once he thought he caught a glimpse of it, but traffic was much heavier than it

had been earlier and he couldn't be sure. He didn't attempt any evasive tactics. If someone was following, it was all right with Mike Shayne.

"One thing you haven't explained yet," he said to Lolita as he drove. "How come Blackie Cord was only going to get twenty thousand dollars out of the quarter million? Wasn't he a full partner with Davy? And how about Dolly Dee?"

"I'm not sure about that either," she said. "I know for sure that Blackie agreed to go in for only twenty thousand. Davy told him that this was a special deal. Davy said a no risk deal. About Dolly I don't know. They kept her out of it. She never came near the kid. I guess she was to share in Blackie's split."

"I don't think she knew how small that split was," Shayne said. "What about this no risk part? Did Davy explain that to you too?"

"Not exactly," Lolita Tendler said. "No risk? Some joke the way it turned out."

"What did he say about it?"

"It wasn't really Davy's deal," she explained. "There was another man brought it to Davy all laid out and ready to go. He never did say who that was. Scared to, I guess. This guy made the plan. He guaranteed no risk. Said that the kid's

parents wouldn't call the police. It would all be smooth as silk. For that he was to get the big split of the ransom. Twenty thousand to Blackie and thirty thousand to Davy and this Mr. Big gets all the rest. We didn't think that was fair," Lolita said.

"I don't suppose you did," Shayne agreed. "That's why you hid the money."

"Yes," she said. "We was going back and skip with the money after we paid off Blackie. Only I never got the chance till now—and Davy's dead."

They were out of town on the old broken down road now and approaching the old house. If anyone was following, he was doing it with his car lights turned off. A man could just about see to drive by the reflected city lights in the distance, but he would have to go slow.

Shayne left his own lights on low beam.

"You say Mr. Big planned the whole deal," he said. "Did he pick this old house for the exchange?"

"No," she told him. "That was Davy's idea. To tell you the truth, we were already planning to keep all the money, except Blackie's split. Davy figured we would stash it out here till we skipped town so it had

to be a place nobody knew about but us."

"I see. How come Davy got Blackie Cord into this deal in the first place? Couldn't you two have handled it all by yourselves? Just one little kid to handle and a guarantee the cops wouldn't be called made it simple. Who needed Blackie?"

"Mr. Big is who," Lolita said. "Anyway it was him told Davy to cut Blackie in on the caper."

By then they were pulling up by the side of the road near the old house where Mike Shayne had brought the money and picked up baby Jean Gallo only twenty four hours earlier.

Shayne got a flashlight out of the glove compartment of his car.

The two of them picked their way around to the back of the house. There was a broken down porch and a door, half off of its hinges. They went through the door into the wreckage of what had once been the kitchen. Broken glass from the windows and plaster fallen from walls and ceiling littered the floor.

"Make it fast," Mike Shayne said.

Lolita reached in under the sink and pulled out the case full of money that Shayne had left for Davy Tendler the night before.

"It will all be here but the

twenty thousand dollars Davy was taking to Blackie Cord," she said.

"I believe you," Mike Shayne said shining his flashlight on the case. "Now we had better get out of here and the faster the better."

"What's the hurry?"

"The hurry is I want to keep you alive. The killer who's been after the money all along followed us out here. At least I'm pretty sure he did. He'll spot our car and the house and come prowling in. I want to be outside and ready to trap him before that happens."

Lolita stepped backward, her face a mask of fear

Suddenly, a volley of shots from an automatic pistol ripped through the door and windows of the kitchen from outside the house.

Mike Shayne had underestimated the killer and cut his timing very close.

As if to compensate, the killer had started shooting too soon. If he had had a flashlight and waited to shine it in a window and spot his targets, Shayne and the woman would have been dead. Instead, he had stood off a ways and pumped bullets at random into the room where he saw the light flicker a moment before.

Lolita Tendler was a small woman. Mike Shayne didn't

wait. His strong left arm plucked her off the floor and over his shoulder even as his right hand pulled his own big Colt's forty-five automatic from the belt holster where he carried it.

In two long strides he was out of the kitchen and into the living room of the decrepit old house. Still carrying Lolita he got to a window. The glass was broken out.

Mike Shayne braced himself to wait for the killer to approach the old house.

Lolita Tendler began to sob and moan in fear.

The killer had been either just outside or on the threshold of the kitchen door by then. He heard the sobbing and stepped back and stumbled and almost fell.

Mike Shayne snapped a shot through the living room door at the sound of movement. The forty-five sounded like a cannon in that enclosed space, and the bullet smashed into the door jam.

The man outside bolted back into the cover of the thick weeds and brush. It was pitch dark in there.

Mike Shayne snapped a shot at the half-glimpsed running figure and missed. Then he heard a car engine start and roar away down the road to Miami.

Shayne practically carried Lolita out to his own car.

XIII

UNCEREMONIOUSLY, Mike Shayne dumped the still startled but much calmer Lolita on the front seat. Quickly, he went around and climbed into the driver's seat.

Lolita stared at him. "What do we do now?" she said.

"We go after him," Mike Shayne said, "and we pray that he doesn't get too much of a start on us."

"How do you know where to find him?"

"I figure I know who he is," Shayne said. "If I'm right there's only one place he can go and one thing he has to try to do. Time enough to call in the authorities then."

Starting the car, the redhead drove down the road as fast as he could. His destination was the Gallo mansion, and he set a new record for the distance in getting there.

Lights were on in the ground floor, and Shayne had no trouble calling Jean Gallo to the door.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, sensing at once that his visit was important. She saw Lolita, but did not even ask who she was.

Shayne wasted no time

either "Your daughter—is she still in the house?"

"Why yes of course At this time of night we wouldn't let her go out "

"Where is she?"

"She's with her father Teddy took her up on the roof to the Captain's Walk She loves to go up with him and have him tell her stories Do you want me to call her?"

"No," Shayne said "I'm going up there and try to get them both down Don't make a move Just stay back " He headed for the stairs "There's all but twenty thousand of your quarter million out in the car This woman is the one Jeannie will identify as the one who took care of her Your husband must know or have guessed I'd bring her here Keep her with you "

Jean Gallo was white as a sheet by now "I'm beginning to understand Then Teddy Teddy is ?"

Mike Shayne didn't stop to answer He was already on his way up the stairs

The Gallo house was a big old, pillared Georgia style mansion, painted white On the roof, as on so many of the old houses after which it was patterned, was a small railed gallery- It was called a Captain's Walk because in the sailing ship days merchant's would use them to watch out for

homecoming ships, or the Captain's wife would walk there and look out for her husband's vessel.

It was reached through a trapdoor from the attic by a flight of wooden steps.

When Mike Shayne reached the foot of the steps the trapdoor was open.

He called up: "Gallo! Come on down and bring the child. This is Mike Shayne talking. It's all up "

There was silence for a moment, and then the child, Jeannie, called out: "Who's that? What does the man mean, Daddy?"

Then Teddy Gallo called out: "I'd be a fool to do that, Shayne You may think you have me, but unless the child positively identifies Tendler's wife, and the woman talks, you've absolutely no real proof to tie me to anything."

"Sure I have. Tendler planned to skip with the money and he told his wife about you."

It was a bluff, and Teddy Gallo called it.

"That's stupid Shayne. Davy never knew my name. He never saw my face unmasked. Somebody else set it up. How did you figure it was me?"

"I might never have got to you if the killing hadn't started," Shayne said. "I spotted Tendler because of some-

thing he said at the payoff. I know most of the hoods in this town. From Davy I found Blackie and Dolly. Dolly was your original contact with the gang, wasn't she? The one suggested you use a small time punk to kidnap your own child?"

"Why should I do that?"

"Because your wife has all the money. A nice clean phony kidnap and a quarter million in your hands. It would have been fine. All you had to do was wait at Blackie's place till Dave Tendler brought the money—take it and vanish. Only Tendler didn't bring the money. You quarrelled and shot him, took the twenty thousand he had and went looking for Blackie and Dolly and Lolita and the rest of the money. You tried to kill Dolly and me at the Purple Pigeon. You killed Blackie's aunt. By then you were in so deep one more killing didn't hurt."

"You might think about that now, Shayne," Teddy Gallo said. "I'm in too far for anything to matter."

"When I said I was going for the money, you followed me when I got Lolita and then to the payoff spot. You never guessed the money was left there. Blackie and Dolly didn't know—and you never got to talk to Lolita. You tried to kill there, but you weren't good

enough, so you panicked and ran back here."

"Suppose I did? Just suppose? I'm still sitting up here with an ace. This is a high spot and the roof is steep. There could be an accident, Shayne."

"She's your own daughter. You love her."

"What's left for me, Shayne? You pointed out how deep I'm in. What do I have to lose? I want a deal."

"Maybe there could be a deal for kidnapping your own kid," Mike Shayne said. "For murder—no deal. You know it. I know it. I'm coming up, Teddy."

"I'm armed."

"Haven't you got it, yet? I'm not afraid of you, Gallo. I'm coming up. Just drop your gun and keep the kid away from the rail and wait."

Shayne climbed the stairs. He could have heard the scream of a falling child or been greeted by a blazing gun.

He could have, but he wasn't. He'd judged his man right.

Five minutes later Jeannie was back in her mother's arms, and Teddy Gallo was waiting for the Beach Police and Chief Peter Painter to arrive.

Late that night Mike Shayne was in Lucy's apartment along with Tim Rourke, relaxing over a coffee royale.

Gentry and Painter had re-

mained at the Gallo house, after Painter admonished Shayne to call him "First thing in the morning." The Gallo money was still loud in his ears—and Mrs. Gallo's obvious approval of Shayne kept Painter from reading the riot act to the redhead in her presence. "It wasn't too hard," Shayne told Lucy and Rourke.

When the killing started it had to be because someone had hidden or skipped with the money. Davy Tendler was dead. The killer tried for both Blackie and Dolly. Lolita was with Lucy here. That meant an outsider was doing the killing. It all added up to Teddy Gallo. A fake kidnap was his chance for a fortune. He contacted Dolly and she suggested Blackie and Davy for the job. All that fitted—only who had the money.

"Then Lolita tipped her hand. When I talked about kidnap-

ping she knew it was a little girl. Nobody told her. She knew. And Gallo wasn't afraid of his daughter identifying Dolly. All of that tipped it for me. Then all I had to do was let Gallo come to me."

"Yeah, and he came too fast," Rourke said.

"That was my one bad moment. I had to get back before he killed Jean to shut her up or kidnapped her again. I had only one thing going my way then. Thank God it worked."

"What was that?"

"He was her real father," Mike Shayne said. "I was sure he wouldn't kill her."

"You can bank on one other thing," Lucy said, refilling the detective's cup.

"What's that, Angel?"

"You'll get it from Petey Painter tomorrow" the petite brunette grinned.

Mike Shayne grinned back. "That's tomorrow," he said.

In the Next Issue—

STURM UND DRANG

THE NEW JOHNNY HAWK THRILLER

by EDWARD Y. BREESE

For Johnny Hawk, the old man and his tale spelled out a trail of murder and revenge that spanned twenty five years. And threatened to erupt in even more tragic ways!

Dog Story

by
BILL
PRONZINI
and
MICHAEL
KURLAND



A watchdog can be a wonderful asset, if it has been properly trained. It can even provide the key to a man's security...

AT TEN-THIRTY Saturday morning I parked my van in front of Number 2419 Melrose Place, on the fashionable North Side of St. Albans. The house was a two-story Colonial that shone an almost polished white in the bright Spring sunlight. It was set behind high, carefully-trimmed hedges, which ran along the road and driveway,

framing the long, rolling sweep of lawn.

All very posh.

Mr. James Gregg was obviously well-off, and could no doubt afford to buy just about any type of sophisticated theftproofing apparatus; but then, some people are stingy and others are cautious. In any event, I would soon enough find

out why Gregg had answered my ad in the *St Albans Press*.

I got out of the van and went around to the rear. When I opened the rear doors, Sam Boy barked softly and leaned his head out to nuzzle my hand. He was a ninety-pound German Shepherd and a product of the specialized training course I had devised a number of years before—one of the finest, most intelligent animals I've ever dealt with.

After he had jumped down, I closed the doors again and then walked up the flagstone path to the front door of the Colonial. Sam Boy followed obediently at my side, and sat immediately when I stopped on the porch.

I rang the bell, waited half a minute. Finally the door was opened by a middle-aged, sandy-haired guy wearing an alpaca golf sweater. He was obviously not a servant, which meant that Gregg probably didn't employ servants; the house wasn't really that large, anyway.

"Yes?" he said politely. Then he noticed Sam Boy sitting behind me. "Oh, you must be the man from *On Guard*!"

"Paul Ferguson," I answered, nodding. "Mr. Gregg?"

"Yes. Come in, please. That's quite a... an *imposing* animal you have there."

"He is that," I said. Different

people have different reactions to ninety pounds of German Shepherd, but Gregg struck me as the kind of man who wouldn't be intimidated by man or beast.

My ad in the *Press* said "Expertly trained guard dogs are the best home security—satisfaction guaranteed. Write *On Guard*!, Box 238, this paper." But I've found, too, that most people have no idea of what an "expertly trained guard dog" is, or what to expect from one.

Some think it's merely a large dog that barks a lot if someone passes too close to the house, while others expect the animal to patrol the house and grounds constantly, identify burglarious intent in the soul of the trespasser, and hold him firmly but gently in one place until the return of the owners.

Still other people expect a friendly companion who can babysit the children; and yet another group looks for a ravening, murderous monster who must be kept chained and can be handled safely by none but his master.

Gregg led Sam Boy and me down a richly-carpeted hall into the living room. He invited me to sit on the couch, and then brought in cups and a silver pot of coffee. His wife was out shopping, he explained, but

whatever he decided would be fine with her.

He asked then, "Exactly what are this animal's capabilities?"

"Were you thinking of using him inside or outside?" I was sitting perched forward on my corner of the couch; the furniture in the living room looked too delicate and antique to be in regular use.

"Inside," Gregg said. "I wish to safeguard my Louis Quinze furniture, and my collection." He patted the side of a glass-fronted cabinet fondly.

"China?" I asked.

"It's called *maulica*," he said. "Actually, it's a type of glass."

"Very pretty."

"Every time I go out I'm afraid that when I come home I'll find I've been cleaned out. 'Ripped off,' as they say nowadays."

"Surely with this valuable collection of yours, and all the other things you have, you've installed a burglar alarm."

"Yes, but I don't trust it," Gregg said. "Burglars are clever, you know. Besides, as you might have noticed, my neighbors are some distance away on both sides. If the alarm went off, they might not even hear it."

"Well, I suppose the ringing alone would probably scare off any housebreaker."

"So I've been told. But I pre-

fer not to take any chances. I might reasonably expect a dog to keep burglars out of the house entirely, mightn't I?"

"Absolutely," I said. "Anyone but yourself or members of your family would not be allowed admittance. Anyone the animal doesn't know well, unless accompanied by someone he *does* know."

"What will he do in the case of a burglar?"

"Stop him," I said. "By brute force, if necessary. Before one could get past Sam Boy, he'd have to kill him; and killing an animal like Sam Boy in a darkened house, while the dog is making one heck of a racket, is a task no sane burglar will undertake."

Gregg thought this over.

"You'd have to take proper care of him, of course," I said. "Both to keep him in top shape and to win his affection. But a dog that loves you is an animal that would do anything for you. *Anything*. You need only communicate to them what you want done. And German Shepherds and other large breeds are surprisingly intelligent. I'm not exaggerating, sir; you can't beat a good, well-trained guard dog."

"I don't know," Gregg said, but he was obviously weakening.

"I'll tell you what, Mr

Gregg," I said, "The animal is very expensive, and I want to be sure you're satisfied and Sam Boy is happy with you before final placement, so I'll give you a two week trial period. At the end of that time, you either write me a check for five hundred dollars or I take him back—with no hard feelings either way."

"That's a lot of money."

"The dog, untrained, is worth over two hundred, Mr. Gregg. But you'll have two weeks to decide. Why don't I just let Sam Boy sell himself?"

I called Sam Boy over and formally introduced him to Gregg. Customers always like that sort of thing, and Gregg was no exception. Just watching the way he ruffled the dog's fur, and responded to the way Sam Boy nuzzled his hand, told me we had him sold. And he confirmed it a moment later.

For the next half hour Gregg and I went over the technical details of feeding, watering, grooming, and otherwise caring for the dog; and I taught him the five or six basic commands he would need to work Sam Boy. "I think that's everything," I told him finally. "You won't have any problems, I'm sure, but I'll check back with you periodically just in case."

"Very good, Ferguson."

After I had politely declined

one last cup of coffee, Gregg took me back into the foyer. I noticed then the box for the burglar alarm he'd mentioned, mounted on the wall to one side of the front door.

It was a common type that could be turned on or off by a simple lever switch on the box, or from the outside by a key. But as Gregg had said, this kind of system isn't really fool-proof; guard dogs, on the other hand, *are*, when properly handled.

I said goodbye to Gregg, and to Sam Boy, and drove back into downtown St. Albans.

At seven-forty-five that night, I called Gregg from a telephone booth in the Golden Mandarin Chinese restaurant. "How are you getting along with Sam Boy, Mr. Gregg?" I asked him.

"Beautifully," he answered. "What a marvelous animal!"

"Isn't he? I was wondering, sir, if I could drop out to see you again one of these evenings? I've just picked up an excellent book on dog handling, and I thought you might enjoy having it."

"That's very nice of you, Ferguson," he said. "Come by any night but tonight. My wife and I have a late dinner engagement with friends."

After we had said goodbyes, I returned to my table and sipped a final cup of tea and broke

open my fortune cookie. EARLY PREPARATIONS MAKE FOR EARLY REWARDS, the fortune said.

I drove around St. Albans for a while, killing time; then, at ten-thirty, I went to Melrose Place. When I saw that Gregg's house was dark, I pulled the van into his driveway and parked in the deep shadows cast by the high bordering hedge. I went over and rang the bell a couple of times. Not a sound but the padding of a dog's paws coming to the door.

"Hi, Sam Boy," I whispered softly—and blew two short blasts on my silent dog whistle. Inside, as he had been so patiently and lovingly trained to do, Sam Boy stood up on his hind legs, with his forepaws on

the wall near the door, and used his teeth to flip the lever switch on the burglar alarm box to *Off*.

When I heard him come back to the door and bark once, I knew that he'd done his job. I hurried around the side of the house to the nearest window, used my glass cutter, and then reached in and opened the window and slid up the sash. Sam Boy was sitting obediently on the floor inside; I leaned in and patted his head, smiling.

Yes sir, I thought, you really can't beat a good, well-trained guard dog. Then I climbed over the sill and began ripping off just one more in our national string of many "satisfied customers". . . .

Complete in the Next Issue—

THREE DOLLS, THREE CASKETS

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Someone was playing "Dead Little Indians" with the women Shayne was seeing, leaving a cold trail of lovely corpses in his wake. First was the girl with the hot reputation for destroying the lives of men, a death no one seemed to regret, but which affected many. Second was a petite young doll who claimed to be a secretary, but found out she was no man's Gal Friday. They found her in the trunk of Shayne's car! The third was a tough type of gal, who made the mistake of dating the redheaded detective too soon for her own good!

DOORWAY TO

AN EXCITING NEW SHORT NOVEL

by RICHARD DEMING

She had hoped to hide in the lonely farmhouse, but now she was trapped. Nothing stood between her and the man who wanted to kill her except a thin panelled door, and her one secret weapon.



COLLEEN DAVIS finally stepped down from the witness stand. The grand jury foreman coldly told her she could go home, his tone suggesting he didn't consider her a very cooperative witness. She showed her displeasure at the implication by giving him an exaggeratedly polite, "Thank you," and walking from the room with her straight little nose in the air.

What had they expected of

her, she wondered with a touch of outrage, perjury? If she had thought John Morgan guilty of the criminal activities alleged against him, she would have said so, but she was convinced the whole investigation was what Morgan claimed: an underhanded maneuver designed to oust him as political leader in the area of the city he controlled.

Even if he was a crook, it

DEATH



would be unreasonable to expect her to know anything about it, she thought indignantly. She was merely a stenographer at the Morgan Amusement Company, and had been there only three weeks.

A near blizzard was lashing Buffalo. Pausing at the main entrance to the County Hall, Colleen peered through the glass at the driving snow, shivering at the thought of waiting on a cold street corner for a bus.

It was after four-thirty P.M. and most offices in the County Hall were closing. A steady stream of people were exiting from the building. Most of the men passing by gave Colleen appraising looks, for she was young and slim and had a fiery darkness about her.

A voice behind her said, "Stranded by the storm?"

Glancing around, she saw it was the assistant district attorney, Henry Blake, who had testified against the Morgan Amusement Company just before she was called. He was tall, blond and about thirty. Because he was on the same side of the fence as the brow-beating grand-jury foreman, her first reaction was to class him as one of the enemy. But as she started to frown, his ruggedly plain face split into such an engagingly friendly

grin, she found herself smiling in response.

"I'm trying to steel myself for a dash to the bus stop," she said.

"Which way do you go?" Blake asked.

"Up Delaware to Bryant. I live a couple of blocks west of Children's Hospital."

"I take Delaware to Gates Circle," Blake said. "I'll drop you off."

Both buttoned their coats to the throats before stepping into the icy blasts outdoors. The temperature wasn't much below freezing, but a cold wind off of Lake Erie was blowing in gusts that nearly swept them from their feet and periodically blinded them by hurling flurries of snow into their faces. They made it to his car a quarter block away at a staggering snail's pace.

Finally inside the car, Colleen said, "Buffalo should be called the windy city instead of Chicago."

"It isn't a very nice day," he understated. "Could you use a warming cup of coffee?"

"I think I need one. But there's no point in going to a restaurant. I have coffee at home."

"That sounds even better," he said.

He was an excellent driver, and despite the storm, they

managed to reach Colleen's apartment quickly.

Colleen's apartment-mate wasn't home. Colleen was surprised that she wasn't, for Marion Hunter had left the County Hall nearly an hour before she had.

As they sat in the small front room waiting for the coffee pot to perk, Colleen asked, "How did you happen to offer me a ride, Mr. Blake? You being on the side of law and order, and that foreman acting as though I were some kind of criminal."

He grinned at her. "Clarence Osgood is something of an ogre, isn't he? But you can't really blame him. It's a little hard to understand how a girl working for Johnny Morgan wouldn't know he was a crook, when everyone else in town knows it."

She stiffened. "Do you think I was lying too?"

"I did at first," Blake confessed cheerfully. "When it came out that you'd been with Morgan only three weeks, and hadn't lived in Buffalo before that, I gave you the benefit of the doubt."

"Well, thanks!" Colleen said indignantly.

"How'd you happen to go to work for Morgan anyway?"

"My apartment-mate got me the job. I was living near Cat-skill, and she wrote me there.

We went to business school together in Rochester a couple of years back."

"Does she work for Morgan too?"

"She's his private secretary. You saw her at the County Hall today."

Blake gave her a curious glance. "You mean Marion Hunter?"

Colleen nodded.

"Now there's a girl I don't understand," he said. "She must know exactly what the Morgan Amusement Company is, because she's been working for Morgan nearly two years. Yet, according to her testimony, she had no more suspicion about his illegal operations than you had."

"Perhaps because there aren't any illegal operations," Colleen responded, a trifle tartly.

"Oh, come on," Blake said indulgently. "The juke boxes, cigarette machines and pinball games he puts in taverns and clubs are the smallest part of his business. His main income comes from illegal slots, the treasury racket, sports pools, and an assortment of bookmakers and brothels."

"That's all rumor put out by his political opponents," Colleen said, beginning to get annoyed.

"Oh? Who told you that?"

"Marion, and she ought to

know. You yourself said she must know exactly what the Morgan Amusement Company is."

Again Blake gave her a curious glance. "Is Marion perhaps a little more than merely Morgan's private secretary?"

Colleen felt herself flushing. "She dates him regularly," she admitted. "But she wouldn't lie to me. Why should she? We're close friends."

The automatic coffee pot setting on the cocktail table before them stopped perking at that moment, and Colleen poured two cups of coffee.

Hank Blake changed the subject by asking, "Did you say you're from Catskill?"

"Yes, but not originally. Dad was a high school teacher in Olean until he retired and bought a farm five years ago. He called it a farm, but it's only two acres, and all he grew was a few vegetables. Two years ago Dad and Mom were killed in an auto accident, and I inherited the place. I'd only finished business school and had no other home, so I moved in and took a job in the Catskill bank. There was really nothing to hold me in Catskill, though, so I was glad when Marion wrote me about a job opening here."

"You sell the farm?"

She shook her head. "I didn't

have time. Marion wanted me to come at once, so I had the water and utilities shut off, locked the doors and moved to Buffalo."

"Maybe it's just as well," Blake said. "If we convict Morgan, you'll probably be out of a job."

"If you do, you'll be putting an innocent man out of business," she said, frowning at him.

Blake said dryly, "If we don't put him out of business, it won't be because he's innocent, but because of his political clout."

"Marion says that's what this is all about. She says the whole investigation is a deliberate smear by his political opponents."

"Nuts," Blake said bluntly. "The prime mover behind this investigation is the district attorney, who happens to belong to the same political party as Morgan. That political-smear blarney is just to confuse the issue. We're out to get him purely and simply because he's dangerous."

"Dangerous to whom?"

"The public. When a racketeer builds political influence, he uses it for one purpose: to protect his rackets. The more influence he builds, the bigger his rackets grow. Johnny Morgan already swings the vote in

a dozen wards. He has a couple of judges, and even a few cops in his pocket. If he isn't stopped, eventually he'll own the town. And he'll open it wide to every form of gambling and vice there is."

Blake sounded so positive that Colleen's faith in her employer momentarily wavered. But she immediately regained it, because it really wasn't her faith in John Morgan he was attacking, but her faith in the girl she lived with. As Blake had said, Marion Hunter's position was such that she almost had to know whether or not the charges against Morgan were true, and she had assured Colleen they were false. Colleen felt no particular loyalty to her employer, because she really didn't know him very well, but she looked up to and admired Marion Hunter.

"I can't believe that," Colleen said. "I don't think the grand jury will ever return an indictment."

"I'm willing to bet they'll return one tomorrow," Blake said confidently.

"Why tomorrow particularly?"

"Because one of your boss's key men is delivering documentary evidence of his rackets."

Then Blake frowned. "I shouldn't have let that drop. Don't mention it to Miss



Hunter, or our witness may show up as a corpse."

Colleen stared at him in outrage. The suggestion that John Morgan might murder a potential witness against him was

bad enough. But the implication that Marion Hunter could be party to such a murder was too much.

"I'm sure your witness would be safe even if I told Marion," she said frigidly. "But I won't mention your slip of the tongue to anyone."

Colleen had the satisfaction of seeing him redden slightly.

II

MARION HUNTER still had not come home by the time Henry Blake departed. When there was no word from her by six P.M., Colleen decided not to wait dinner any longer. She broiled a single small steak and sat down to eat alone in the kitchen.

At eight P.M. Marion phoned. "Colleen?" she asked in a breathless voice. "Are you alone?"

"Yes," Colleen said.

"I'm way up on the north side, and Johnny's awaiting word from me at the office. Will you take a taxi over there and give him a message?"

"Can't you phone?" Colleen asked.

"Not with this investigation going on, because his phone may be tapped. And it would take too long for me to get there. This has to get to Johnny right away."

"All right," Colleen said doubtfully.

"Tell him it's Joe, and he's en-route to the office now."

"Tell him what's Joe? And Joe who?"

"He'll know," Marion said.

"Simply give him the message."

"All right. But what—"

"I'll explain later," Marion interrupted. "*Please* hurry." The phone went dead.

The urgency in Marion's voice made Colleen dial for a taxi at once. She put on her galoshes and coat, and was waiting in the lower hall when it pulled up in front.

"The Banner Building on South Main," she told the driver. "And please hurry."

He did hurry, considering driving conditions. The storm still raged, and constant gusts of wind raised clouds of powdery snow before the windshield, periodically reducing visibility to zero and slowing the taxi to a crawl. It was twenty-five minutes after Marion's phone call before she arrived at the Banner Building.

Frugally, Colleen dismissed the cab, intending to take a bus on the return trip. Then, buffeted by wind and with her face stinging from the snow, she ran for the building entrance.

The Morgan Amusement Company occupied the fourth floor. Colleen found the de-

sented downstairs lobby dimly illuminated by a single night light. When she stepped off the self-service elevator, she found that a similar small bulb was all that lighted the corridor here too. But at the far end of the hall the glass upper pane of the door into the main business office glowed brightly.

Quickly she moved along the hall, her rubber-soled galoshes making no sound against the carpeting. Opening the office door, she found every light in the large room blazing. But the room was empty.

Directly across from her the door to John Morgan's private office stood slightly ajar. Leaving the door she had entered by wide open, Colleen started across the room. As the office floor was cork, again her footsteps made no sound.

She was reaching out to push open her employer's door when a voice from inside made her pause.

"I let poor Marion waste half the afternoon running down a rumor for me," the smooth voice of John Morgan said. "Then you tip the whole thing by letting me catch you in the act of filching my private books. How'd you know their hiding place?"

"I stumbled on it tonight by accident, Johnny," said a husky voice. Colleen recognized it as

belonging to Joe Valentine, whose title in the company was sales manager, but whose actual duties were vague to her. "I didn't even know the books were in there. I was poking around. What rumor you talking about?"

"The one that one of my boys was turning state's evidence. Did you think you could turn rat without me knowing, Joe? I've got ears all over town, even one in the D.A.'s office."

"Listen," Joe Valentine said. "You got this all wrong. Crossing you would be the last thing I'd try."

"You're right about that," Morgan said. "Bye, Joe."

"Wait, Johnny! For cripes sake, don't!"

All this time Colleen had stood with her hand rigidly outstretched toward the door, not deliberately eavesdropping, but too disturbed by the nature of the conversation to move. Now, frightened by the urgency in Joe Valentine's voice, she convulsively thrust the door open at the moment a pistol shot reverberated in the small room.

Her ears ringing, she stood motionless with shock in the doorway and watched the swarthy Joe Valentine press hands to his stomach and slowly crumple to the floor. Standing behind his desk with a revolver

held negligently in his hand was John Morgan, his expression one of cold disdain as he watched the man he had shot die.

Morgan's gaze jumped to the girl in the doorway, his face at first registering consternation, then a sort of wary relief when he saw she was alone.

"You killed him!" Colleen whispered unbelievably.

"Yes," Morgan snapped in anger. "Too bad you had to stumble along at this precise moment."

Carefully he shifted the muzzle of the gun toward her, and his finger was whitening on the trigger¹³ before his intention penetrated Colleen's stunned mind. Instinctively she threw herself backward and to one side as the shot roared out.

The bullet plucked at the cuff of her coat and imbedded itself in the far wall. Before Morgan could fire again, Colleen pressed against the wall outside the door, beyond his range of vision.

She poised there barely a micro-second, then streaked across the room toward the other door. Fortunately she had left this wide open when she came in. She was in the corridor and a quarter-way down it before Morgan could round his desk and reach the main office. Another shot sounded as she

ran toward the stairhead, the slug striking the wall alongside of her and spraying her face with powdered plaster.

Then Colleen had reached the stairhead and was taking the steps downward three at a time. The dull pounding of feet in the corridor above, muffled by the hall carpeting, came to her as she rounded the first landing. Terror increased the speed of her hurtling descent, and she had reached the third floor before she heard the clatter of pursuit at the top of the stairs.

By the time Colleen reached the second floor the sound of pursuit had stopped. Nevertheless she continued downward without slowing speed, somehow miraculously avoiding either a stumble or a turned ankle. At the main floor she didn't even pause in her headlong flight, scampering across the small lobby and hurling herself against the outside door with such force, it slammed back against the front of the building.

She turned so that the force of the wind was to her back, and ran a full block up Main Street before exhaustedly staggering into a darkened shop doorway to catch her breath. For a few moments Colleen stood there out of the wind, drawing air into over-taxed

lungs in huge gasps. When her breathing had settled somewhat, she fearfully peered around the edge of the doorway back toward the Banner Building.

Through the blowing snow she barely made out the figure of a hatless man in front of the building. She knew it was Morgan by the way he peered in both directions. Drawing back into the shelter of the doorway, she watched him through the glass corner of the show window, and was ready for flight if he made a move in her direction.

Even at that distance Colleen could see him shiver violently, and realized he wore only a suit coat. After another glance in both directions, Morgan disgustedly spat into the gutter, turned and slammed back into the building.

Colleen ran another block up Main before huddling into another shop doorway.

The logical action of immediately running to the police didn't even occur to Colleen. Momentarily she was too stunned by what she had seen, and too frightened by her employer's attempt to kill her to think of anything but escape. Police headquarters was nearer to her present location than her apartment by two miles, but when a cruising taxi drifted by,

she hailed it and headed for the refuge of home.

All the way, she cowered in the back of the cab without saying a word to the driver. When he pulled up in front of her apartment house, she handed him two bills and ran for the sanctuary of the building without waiting for change.

Safely inside her apartment, reaction set in. Bolting the door, Colleen leaned her back against it and let her breath escape in shuddering gasps.

Marion Hunter came from the kitchen and looked at her in astonishment. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Colleen ran across the room to cling to the older girl. Her voice came out as a quavering squeak. "John Morgan killed Joe Valentine, Marion. With a gun. I saw it. And he tried to kill me. He's gone stark raving mad."

III

MARION HUNTER was a tall blonde of twenty-eight, five years older than Colleen. Age wasn't the only difference between them. Where Colleen was small and quick-moving, Marion was statuesque and queenly and always totally in command of herself. One of the things Colleen admired about her was her unflappability.

This showed in the blonde woman's reaction to Colleen's startling announcement. Beyond a slight narrowing of her eyes she exhibited no emotion. Reassuringly patting the smaller girl's back, she said soothingly, "Let me help you off with your things before you tell me about it."

Leading Colleen into the bedroom, she helped her off with her coat as though Colleen were a child, and even stooped to assist her with her galoshes. When Colleen tried to stutter an excited elaboration of her startling announcement, Marion shook her head and said quietly, "Wait until you settle down, dear. You're nearly hysterical."

Obediently Colleen quieted. After hanging Colleen's coat in her closet, Marion led her into the front room, made her sit on the sofa and stood looking down at her.

"Now tell me about it, dear," the older girl said soothingly.

As Colleen recounted what had happened, excitement began to rebuild in her as she relived the terrifying experience of seeing Joe Valentine crumple to the floor and die, and of her headlong flight from John Morgan amid a shower of bullets.

When she finished, Marion asked, "Why did you come

home instead of going to the police? You were only a few blocks from headquarters."

"I was so frightened, all I could think of was getting home." Colleen started to get up. "I'll have to call them now. I should have done it the minute I walked in."

"Keep your seat," Marion said. "You're still too excited to make sense over a phone. I'll call them."

Marion went over to the end table where the phone was, checked the phone book and dialed a number. When someone answered, she said, "Sergeant Klath, please." After listening a moment, she said, "Oh, thank you," and hung up.

As she started to thumb through the phone book again, Colleen asked, "What's the matter?"

"Sergeant Klath is on the day shift. I'll have to phone him at home."

"Why didn't you just report to the policeman who answered?"

"Because I know Sergeant Klath personally," Marion said. "When you're involved in a murder, it's wiser to deal with someone you know."

Colleen casually knew the man referred to also, a sergeant on the gambling squad and a frequent visitor to the office of the Morgan Amusement Com-

pany. As Marion dialed again, it occurred to Colleen to wonder for the first time why a policeman should visit a place like Morgan's so often.

The thought reminded Colleen of a remark Hank Blake had made that John Morgan had "a couple of judges, and even a few cops in his pocket." At the time Colleen dismissed the remark as merely a part of the political smear directed against her employer. But the murder of Joe Valentine made it starkly clear that the charges against Morgan were no smear. He was a racketeer.

Sergeant Klath had to be one of the policemen on his payroll. Even the fact that he was on the gambling squad fitted, for most of the illegal activity Morgan was accused of involved gambling.

Then a series of other thoughts simultaneously crowded into Colleen's mind. Just before killing Joe Valentin, John Morgan had said to him, "I let poor Marion waste half the afternoon running down a rumor for me." When Marion had phoned instructions for Colleen to deliver the message to Morgan, she had said, "Just tell him it's Joe, and he's en route to the office now."

Colleen realized that Marion had known all along that John Morgan was a racketeer, and



had deliberately lied to Colleen. She had even known that Joe Valentine was going to turn state's evidence when she attempted to use Colleen to get that information to Morgan.

Perhaps Marion hadn't known Morgan intended to kill the betrayer when he found out who he was, but now that she knew Morgan was a murderer, it was rapidly becoming clear to Colleen that Marion intended to help cover up the murder—even if it meant arranging for Colleen to be silenced.

The thought horrified Colleen as much as it frightened her, because it seemed inconceivable that anyone she liked and ad-

mired as much as Marion could so coldly and deliberately mark her for murder. As she listened to Marion coolly explaining the circumstances of the killing to Sergeant Klath, with rather marked emphasis on Colleen being the only witness, it became distressingly obvious that she was doing exactly that. Marion had phoned Sergeant Klath not because he was a policeman, but because he was a tool of Morgan's. And the murder report would stop right there.

It was a good thing Marion's back was to her, because Colleen was sure the horror she felt must be showing on her face. Rising to her feet, she quietly moved into the kitchen and toward the back door.

From the kitchen doorway Marion's voice asked, "Where are you going?"

After a momentary pause Colleen veered right toward the bedroom doorway and, with her back still to Marion, said, "To the bathroom."

She went through the bedroom, into the bathroom, and locked the door.

Standing before the mirror, Colleen looked at her white face and wondered what to do. She was no physical match for Marion, because the blonde outweighed her bare hundred and five pounds by at least

thirty pounds. And she was certain Marion would block any attempt either to leave the apartment or use the phone.

She wasn't sure that a call to the police would save her anyway. Hank Blake had intimated that several policemen were on Morgan's payroll. Suppose the one who answered the phone was another tool of Morgan's?

Having been raised to believe the police were her protectors, it was a shattering experience to have them suddenly loom as a threat instead of a refuge.

She thought of Hank Blake. If she could only phone him—

Then she recalled John Morgan's statement that he had "ears all over town, even in the D.A.'s office." She was sure that Blake was no tool of Morgan's, but considering the fate of Joe Valentine, the amount of protection she could expect from the district attorney's office didn't seem very reassuring.

A tap came at the bathroom door and Marion called, "Are you all right, dear?"

"Of course," Colleen called back in a steady voice. "I'll be out in a minute."

When she heard Marion move from the bedroom, she cautiously opened the bathroom door. In the kitchen she heard water running. Standing out of

sight from the kitchen, Colleen tried to think of a way to get out of the apartment without being stopped by Marion. Eventually she thought of a dangerous plan that might work, if her timing was exactly right.

Forcing her face into placid lines, Colleen walked to the kitchen doorway. Marion was doing the dishes from her late dinner. Colleen glanced at the wall clock, which showed a few minutes past ten.

"I'm going to take a bath," she said casually. "You can let the police in when they arrive."

"All right, dear," Marion said. "Go ahead."

Retreating into the bedroom, Colleen quietly got her coat and galoshes from the closet, a head scarf and gloves from a dresser drawer and her purse from on top of the dresser. Carrying everything into the bathroom, she locked the door. She turned on the water and while it ran she dressed for outdoors.

Then she turned off the water and simply waited. While waiting she counted the money in her purse and was relieved to find she had nearly fifty-five dollars.

It was warm in the bathroom, and the emotional strain of waiting increased her discomfort. Her plan rested on precise timing, and her fear that she wouldn't be able to

carry it off increased by the minute. Suppose she failed to hear the doorbell?

Alarmed by this thought, Colleen pressed her ear against the bathroom door. Five more minutes dragged by like hours before she finally heard the front doorbell chime.

Instantly Colleen unlocked and cracked open the bathroom door. When she heard Marion's footsteps move from the kitchen into the front room, she opened the door the rest of the way, darted across the bedroom and into the kitchen. She reached for the bolt to the back door at the same time she heard Marion open the front door.

As Colleen tugged at the bolt, she heard the brusque voice of John Morgan ask, "All right, where is she?"

"In the bathtub," Marion said serenely. "There's no hurry. She isn't even suspicious."

Colleen tugged again, desperately.

The back-door bolt was stuck.

IV

BELATEDLY, because she almost never used the back door, Colleen remembered that the bolt was always difficult to draw. It took a series of complicated actions to open.

There was no time for such manipulation now. Heavy male

footsteps crossing the front room to the accompaniment of Marion's lighter ones sent Colleen cowering alongside the refrigerator. It wasn't much cover, for if any of the four persons marching by into the bedroom had glanced that way, she would have been discovered.

Fortunately their attention was concentrated on the bedroom doorway. First Marion went by, closely followed by a huge, bull-necked man named Nick Satcz. Satcz was supposed to be a salesman for the Morgan Amusement Company, but Colleen had noticed that he never seemed to have much to do except lounge around the office. John Morgan was third in line, and bringing up the rear was fat, whisky-reddened Sergeant Klath.

The instant the sergeant disappeared into the bedroom, Colleen tiptoed across the kitchen into the front room, taking her front-door key from her purse as she went. She heard a startled exclamation from Marion, followed by a peevish grunt from Nick Satcz, as she reached the front door.

Colleen yanked the door open. She was in the hallway, pulling the door closed again, when John Morgan appeared between the kitchen and front room. She caught only a glimpse of his enraged expres-

sion before drawing the door shut with a bang. The lock was one of those old-fashioned ones that took an iron key. Quickly slipping her key home, she locked the door. An instant later the knob turned and the door shook.

Leaving the key in the lock so that Marion couldn't unlock it from inside, she ran down the stairs at full speed. Swirling snow nearly blinded her the moment she stepped outdoors; but she was thankful for the cloak of invisibility the storm gave her. If she could hardly see as she ran toward Delaware Avenue, anyone following her would be under an equal handicap.

Colleen estimated that she had no more than a two-minute start on her pursuers, because it would take no longer than that for them to go out by the back door and circle around the building. She ran the full two blocks to Delaware Avenue, not even pausing at the intersection to check for oncoming traffic. She was almost hit by a truck as she trotted across Delaware, but the shout from the startled truck driver didn't even make her break stride as she ran on.

There was a taxicab in front of the Sheritan Hotel. Tumbling into the back seat, out of breath, she gasped, "Just start

driving. I'll tell you where in a minute."

Obediently the driver pulled away from the curb, heading south on Delaware. They had gone three blocks before Colleen recovered her breath enough to start thinking about where she wanted to go. Up to now she had been merely fleeing, with no ultimate destination in mind.

Still fearful of John Morgan's influence in the police department, it didn't even occur to her to tell the driver to take her to police headquarters. But as she spotted a drugstore ahead, she suddenly again thought of Hank Blake. On impulse she told the driver to stop.

Asking him to wait, Colleen ran into the drugstore, entered the phone booth and opened the phone book. To her surprise there was only one Henry Blake listed, and no Blakes with merely the initial H. Dropping a coin in the slot, she dialed the number listed. A sleepy male voice she didn't recognize answered.

"Is Mr. Henry Blake there?" she asked.

"Speaking."

"Oh," she said. "The Henry Blake I wanted is an assistant district attorney."

A trifle wearily the voice said, "No relation, lady, but I get

calls for him all the time. He must have an unlisted number. You got me out of bed."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Colleen said contritely.

"It's okay," the man said, and hung up.

She was fairly sure there would be no one at the D.A.'s office at this time of night, but she looked up the number and tried it anyway. There was no answer.

Stepping from the booth, Colleen contemplated her next move before venturing back out into the storm. And suddenly she thought of one place she would be safe.

Back in the taxicab, she said to the driver, "The New York Central Station, please."

Colleen arrived at the station five minutes before a train to New York City pulled out. She bought a one-way ticket as far as Hudson.

It was five A.M. when she got off the train at Hudson. Daytimes there was a shuttle bus between Hudson and Catskill, but it didn't run at that early hour. Colleen hired a cab to take her through Catskill and on out to her farm. She arrived home at five thirty in the morning.

The farm was approximately eight miles beyond Catskill, the second house on a narrow road that was little more than a

lane leading off Old King's Road, and which dead-ended at a deserted farm three miles past Colleen's place. The house nestled against a small hill in a valley through which the only creek in the area ran. It was set fifty feet from the road, and the garage a bare ten feet, the location having been planned to make getting in and out during snowy weather convenient.

Colleen glanced into the garage long enough to satisfy herself that the ancient station wagon was as she had left it, its radiator empty and its wheels up on blocks. Then she went on to the house.

The house was not large as farmhouses go, consisting of only a kitchen, storeroom and woodshed downstairs, two bedrooms, a living room and bath upstairs. Its position against the side of the hill left the upstairs front room at ground level on one side of the house, and the downstairs kitchen at ground level on the other side.

The woodshed was well-stocked with cordwood, and the first thing Colleen did was to build a roaring fire in the old-fashioned kitchen range. When it was going well, she got a can of fuel oil from the storeroom, filled and lighted the big Victrola-type circulating heater on the second floor. Then she made several trips with a buck-

et to the spring fifty yards away, until she had a ten-gallon emergency water crock in the storeroom filled. Water from the spring was piped into the house, but the system involved an electric pump, and until she could get the electricity turned on, she would have to carry water.

There was plenty of canned food and staples in the house. After the place warmed up, Colleen prepared herself a breakfast of pancakes and tinned sausage before falling into bed and exhaustedly sleeping until noon.

Except for what she wore on the train, all of Colleen's good clothes were in the apartment in Buffalo. But there were plenty of work clothes in the house. After lunch she dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt, bundled herself up and went out to grapple with the station wagon.

It took Colleen an hour and two blistered fingers to jack up each wheel individually and remove its blocks. After standing only three weeks, none of the tires needed air, she was gratified to find.

Within another fifteen minutes she had the radiator filled with the Zerone she had carefully preserved, the oil checked and the gas tank filled from the hundred-gallon hand

pump next to the garage. It took another ten minutes to start the engine, but at last she was ready to go to town.

Colleen didn't bother to change, as women in farm clothing were a common sight in Catskill.

By five o'clock she was home again with a long list of accomplishments behind her. Arrangements had been made to have the electricity turned on the next day, and the telephone the day after. She had bought a supply of pantyhose, underthings and handkerchiefs, and had used most of the rest of the cash she had brought with her from Buffalo for a huge box of groceries and two five-gallon cans of fuel oil.

Colleen could now exist in the house for weeks, even if she were snowbound. And though her immediate cash was almost exhausted, she had a small savings account in the Catskill bank which would carry her over until she decided what to do about getting another job.

It wasn't until after dinner that night, as she sat in the front room by the flickering light of a coal-oil lamp and ruefully regarded the dead television set, that Colleen found time to think of what she ought to do about John Morgan. Obviously she had to report Joe Valentine's murder.



After some thought she decided the safest person to report it to would be Hank Blake. She decided to phone him the moment her phone was reinstalled the day after tomorrow.

Before going to bed she dressed warmly and walked to her favorite spot, the bridge where the road crossed the creek a few yards beyond the house. Although it was cold, there was no snow on the ground here, and the night was beautifully clear. By a nearly-full ascending moon she could see the dark Levanthal house two-hundred yards away across the creek, at the point the lane joined Old King's Road. In the

opposite direction, beyond the small hill against which her house rested, she could see the tip of the Weatherby house.

The silence of the night caused a sense of peace to steal over her, making the nightmare events in Buffalo seem far away and unimportant.

Then, gradually, this same silence began to have another effect. Again looking at the dark houses of her only two near neighbors, the uneasy thought that she was completely isolated occurred to her. Both the Levanthal and Weatherby places were merely summer residences, owned by New Yorkers who boarded them up every winter.

And the nearest occupied farm was more than five miles away.

V

THE NEXT morning, Friday, the electricity was turned on. Colleen stored away the coal-oil lamps, started the water pump and switched on the electric hot-water heater. By noon the tank had heated enough for her to take her first hot bath since leaving Buffalo.

Saturday morning her phone was reconnected. A light snow started while the repairman was there, and as he started to leave he frowned at the dark

clouds forming on the horizon to the northeast.

"Good thing I got here today," he said. "By Monday I might not have been able to get out here."

Colleen studied the clouds too. While the prospect of a blizzard didn't appeal to her, it didn't particularly disturb her, because the house was snug and she had supplies enough to last for weeks. Nevertheless she was glad the phone was connected, so that if she was snowed in, at least she would have communication with civilization.

As soon as the repairman left, Colleen placed a person-to-person call for Henry Blake at the Erie County district attorney's office. Apparently the office was closed on Saturdays, for the operator reported no answer.

There was nothing to do but postpone her report of Joe Valentine's murder until Monday.

By Monday she was snowed in.

The storm had swept down on Saturday night. For twenty-four hours it roared through the small valley, leaving a foot and a half of snow on the ground and in places piling up drifts as deep as six feet. Sunday night it began to abate, and Monday dawned clear and

cold and still, with the temperature hovering around zero.

As far as Colleen could see from her kitchen windows there was a solid blanket of snow, with no break in it to distinguish where the buried road was. From past experience she knew that the order of road clearance would be first the Thruway, then the nearby main highways, then the secondary roads such as Old King's Road, and only after all those were cleared would the plows get to little traveled lanes such as the one that wound past her house. She figured she was snowed in until at least Wednesday, and possibly until Thursday.

Colleen tried her long-distance call again, and this time managed to reach Hank Blake at his office. He seemed both surprised and relieved to hear from her.

"I've been trying to reach you ever since last Thursday," he said. "Your apartment-mate kept claiming she didn't know where you were. What are you doing in Catskill?"

"Hiding," Colleen said.

"Hiding from what?"

"John Morgan. He tried to kill me."

"He what?" Blake asked on a high note.

"Tried to kill me." Colleen took a deep breath and tumbled

out the whole story of witnessing Joe Valentine's murder, her flight from Morgan's bullets, and her later hairbreadth escape from the apartment.

"I suppose I should have gone straight to the police instead of catching a train out of town," she concluded. "But I was so panic-stricken, all I could think of was getting away from Morgan. Until I quieted down and began to think clearly, Sergeant Klath's actions had me convinced the whole police force was in league with Morgan."

"It isn't," Blake said definitely. "Buffalo's force is one of the cleanest in the country. I doubt that Morgan has more than a couple of minor cops accepting his graft. And I didn't think he had any who would go along with murder. The police commissioner will be interested to hear about Klath."

His tone changed to one of almost pleased excitement. "This puts friend Morgan right where we want him, Colleen. Just as we thought he'd completely slipped the hook."

"How do you mean, slipped the hook?"

"When we couldn't produce the evidence Joe Valentine promised, our whole case collapsed. The grand jury released Morgan, and he's free as air. When Joe disappeared, we sus-

pected foul play, of course, but without proof we couldn't do a thing. Listen, how quickly can you get back to Buffalo?"

"That's hard to say," Colleen told him. "I'm snowbound. It will probably be a few days before I'm plowed out. Or even a week, if the storm decides to return."

Blake was silent for a few moments. Then he asked, "Has it occurred to you that Morgan may have guessed where you went?"

It hadn't, and the words sent a little shiver of fear over Colleen. She opened her mouth to say, "He doesn't know where I live," but failed to say it, realizing that Marion knew and would easily have told Morgan.

"He couldn't get to me even if he did know I was here," she said a little shakily. "He's snowed out just as I'm snowed in."

"Maybe," Blake said. "But to be on the safe side, we'll put Mr. Morgan where he can't do any harm. In a cell. I'll have him picked up within an hour."

He gave Colleen his home phone number and told her to call him either at home or at his office to let him know what train she would arrive on.

"Phone the minute you discover you can get out of the house," Blake instructed. "And meantime don't worry. Nobody

can hurt you because Morgan will be in jail, and we'll keep Marion Hunter and Sergeant Klath under twenty-four-hour surveillance to make sure they don't slip off toward Catskill. And to make doubly sure, we'll stick tails on all of Morgan's so-called salesmen too."

Visualizing all the machinery of law and order which would shortly go into action to protect her made Colleen feel considerably safer. Hank Blake's final words lifted her spirits even more.

"About that call I've been trying to make since last Thursday," he said with transparent casualness. "Be interested in dinner when you get back to Buffalo?"

Colleen didn't believe in being coy with men she liked. With unladylike enthusiasm she said, "I'd enjoy it very much."

"Then it's a date," he said.

After Colleen hung up she found herself singing as she went about household chores, and grinned to herself when she realized she was in the mental attitude of a teen-ager who had just been asked for her first date. But less than a half hour later uneasy fear destroyed her feeling of happiness.

The phone rang and an operator's voice asked for ver-

ification of her number, then said, "Ten cents, please."

After a moment of silence the operator said, "I'm sorry, but the calling party seems to have hung up."

"Do you know where the call was from?" Colleen asked.

"From a local pay station."

"Thanks," Colleen said slowly, cradling the receiver.

Had it merely been someone who realized he'd called a wrong number as he got ready to drop the coin, or was it Marion Hunter, or John Morgan, or one of Morgan's hired gunmen, checking to see if anyone answered her phone?

Perhaps the law-enforcement machinery Hank Blake intended to set in motion had been started too late. Maybe Morgan or one of his killers was already in Catskill.

Walking to the kitchen window, Colleen peered out at the unbroken blanket of snow, drawing reassurance from its impassible expanse. She crossed to the opposite window and looked off to the northeast. Dark, low-hanging clouds were forming again, promising a second blizzard. The sight both depressed and relieved her, for if another storm of the same intensity followed on the heels of the first, she would be safely isolated for at least a week.

Which would only postpone

the danger, of course. Inevitably a time would come when the snow was cleared away.

VI

THE STORM struck again in the middle of the night and raged all of the following day. Then, instead of abating at nightfall, the wind increased in intensity, sometimes reaching nearly hurricane proportions.

When Colleen awakened at seven Wednesday morning and reached for her bedside lamp, it failed to go on. Feeling her way to the bathroom, she found that light dead too. She checked the electric hot-water heater, found it off and decided the storm had knocked out the main electrical lines.

At least she wouldn't be without water, she thought. The pump had filled the two-hundred-and-fifty-gallon gravity tank in the attic, which could last weeks if it had to.

Going downstairs in her robe, she got out the coal-oil lamps again, lighted a couple and built up the banked fire in the kitchen range. Then it occurred to Colleen to check the telephone.

It was dead. She was completely cut off from the outside world.

About noon the storm abruptly stopped and a cold sun

came out. Peering from the windows, Colleen estimated the average level of snow at about two and a half feet, which meant some drifts might be piled as high as ten. On the kitchen side of the house it was waist-deep against the door, reaching nearly to the window sills.

On the upper side of the house snow was piled only to the level of the front-porch floor, so that door wasn't blocked. More to have something to do than because there was any point in it, she shoveled off the front porch, then swept it clean.

Thursday morning she heard a snowplow laboring along Old King's Road, and from the upper windows she watched its creeping progress. Its passage left a canyon adequate for traffic between high snowbanks, but it was of no use to Colleen. Even an army tank couldn't have traversed the two hundred yards from her garage to Old King's Road.

After lunch she went to the upstairs windows to see if she could spot the snowplow, hoping that by some freak chance its operator intended to get to her lane that day. The plow was not in sight, but something else caught Colleen's eye. Snowshoe tracks made a trail across the smooth snow from

the direction of the Weatherby house to her roadside mailbox, then turned at right angles past the Levanthal house to Old King's Road. At the edge of the road they disappeared.

At first their significance escaped Colleen. Knowing that the Weatherby house was vacant, she was merely puzzled. Then the pattern of the tracks struck her, and she recalled the odd phone call when the caller hung up without speaking. Her breath caught in her throat.

Someone had been laboriously trekking from farmhouse to farmhouse, checking the names on mailboxes. The pattern of the tracks, abruptly turning toward the Levanthal house from her box, indicated that the search had been completed.

It was not hard to figure out why such a search had been necessary. Although Marion Hunter knew Colleen's address, she had never been to the farm, and the address was simply R.D. One, Catskill, New York. Dozens of farms had the same address.

She had to assume that the tracks had been made by some minion of John Morgan's. They were recent enough so that there was at least a chance that if she could get to Old King's Road, she could flag a ride from some passing farmer

before the report of her location could get back to Morgan and he could arrive. The road was little traveled, but at least that would give her some chance.

Slipping into a ski suit and boots, Colleen stepped to the front porch and hastily tied on snowshoes. Before leaving the porch, she nervously scanned the snowbank edging Old King's Road as far as she could see. No one was in sight, and she headed for the road.

In the center of the bridge spanning the creek she came to an abrupt halt, staring with a thumping heart at the Levanthal house.

Noticing that the boards had been removed from all the upstairs windows, she understood John Morgan's strategy in taking over the deserted house. Edging Old King's Road, the Levanthal house commanded a view of the road for a half mile in both directions. Colleen couldn't possibly reach the road without being seen by watchers in the upper windows.

She couldn't even take the opposite direction toward the mountains without being spotted the moment she reached the first high ground beyond her house. She was trapped as effectively as though Morgan's gunmen ringed her on all sides.

John Morgan could sit at ease in his observation post and



wait until he decided it was time to attack.

Shuffling back to the house on the cumbersome webs, Colleen left them on the front porch, bolted the doors from inside and checked all the window locks. The check gave her little assurance, for the windows had no shutters, and a foot could kick through both the storm windows and the inner panes with little trouble.

She wondered why Morgan was waiting. It occurred to her that since he had no reason to think she suspected he was anywhere nearby, he was in no hurry because he wouldn't expect her to attempt escape.

Probably he was simply waiting for darkness.

Her thoughts turned to self-defense.

Her father had occasionally hunted small game, and she knew there were a couple of guns somewhere in the house. Colleen found them in the closet of the bedroom where her parents had slept, a double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun and a single-shot twenty-two rifle.

Colleen took them out.

She knew nothing of guns, but after a little gingerly experimentation, she discovered how to break open the shotgun. It was empty. Without success she searched the house for shotgun shells. However, she did find a box of twenty-two shorts in her father's dresser.

She practiced cocking the twenty-two and pulling the trigger a few times with the chamber empty, then, with her heart in her throat for fear it might go off accidentally, Colleen experimented until she learned how to load it and eject a cartridge. When she had mastered both techniques, she loaded the gun a last time and laid it on top of her bed.

The rest of the afternoon Colleen spent at the living-room windows, uneasily watching the Levant house. Aside from a thin trail of smoke rising from

the chimney, there was no sign of life there.

When light began to fade about six P.M., the thought of dinner didn't even occur to her.

By seven P.M. it was pitch dark. She lit no lamps, sitting in the dark by the front-room windows, straining her eyes against the outside darkness and her ears against the stillness. Shortly before eight, a pale moon rose, but it did little to increase visibility. All day fluffy white clouds had drifted across the sky, and now they filtered the brightness from the moon's rays, allowing only a tepid luminosity to seep through. Occasionally the clouds would momentarily part, and for an instant bright moonlight would light the snow as though some passing airplane had suddenly turned a searchlight downward. But most of the time Colleen could see no more than fifty feet from the house.

When nine P.M. came with nothing happening, she began to wonder if it was only her imagination that had placed John Morgan in the house across the creek. But a mental review of the evidence—the mysterious phone call, the snowshoe tracks, the inescapable fact that *someone* was in the old Levant house—convinced her that it wasn't

merely jitters on her part. Morgan had to be the house-breaker.

At nine thirty she heard a single shot from somewhere in the near distance. Colleen was sure it was a shot, but the acoustics of the valley were deceiving when it was blanketed with snow, and she couldn't judge from what distance or what direction it came. With her heart pounding she made a circuit of all the upstairs windows.

When she spotted nothing, she nervously continued to circle the upstairs, peering out the windows in all four directions. On her fourth circuit, while she was looking toward the creek from her parents' bedroom, she finally spotted a movement when the clouds suddenly thinned.

At first Colleen thought it was a large dog standing at the creek bank. Then she realized it was a man crawling on all fours.

For a numb moment she merely stared as he slowly executed the top of the bank on hands and knees, like a soldier reluctantly going over the top. Without waiting for the man to complete the maneuver, Colleen whirled and raced into her bedroom.

Grabbing the twenty-two rifle from her bed, she raced

back to the other room and stared out toward the creek again, her hands shaking violently as she awkwardly held the gun pointed that way.

Reaching the top of the creek bank, the man climbed to his feet and stood erect but swaying, thigh-deep in snow. In the gray moonlight Colleen could at first make out only that he was hatless and that his overcoat was white with snow. Then, as he began an erratic lurch toward the house, she realized that he was either drunk or hurt.

A second later one of the momentary cloud partings occurred, and for an instant the snow was lighted to almost daytime brightness. As moon rays glinted on the man's blond head, Colleen recognized with a mixture of joy and dismay that it was Hank Blake.

VII

COLLEEN DIDN'T stop to wonder what the assistant district attorney was doing outside in the snow. She only knew that he was an ally, was in trouble and needed help.

She thought of the shot she had heard. He was wounded!

Leaning her gun against the wall, she ran to her own bedroom and hurriedly pulled on her ski suit and boots. She next

ran back downstairs, and groped in the dark storeroom until she found a second pair of snowshoes. On the front porch she quickly tied her own on and circled the house at a shuffling trot, carrying the others.

A hundred feet from the house Blake had collapsed on his face in the snow. Dropping the extra shoes next to him, Colleen stooped and sickly examined the red stain high on the left side of his back.

She rolled him over, his eyes opened, he blew snow from his nostrils and stared up at her bleakly.

After a moment recognition showed in his face, but when he spoke, it was in the faraway voice of shock. "Morgan," he said. "I was looking for your place and walked right into his arms."

"Can you walk if I put snowshoes on you and help you up?" Colleen asked.

Blake's head moved in a discouragingly slow nod, but his eyes seemed to clear a little. She bent at his feet, lashing the extra snowshoes over his galoshes. When they were firmly on, she got behind him, slipped a hand under each shoulder and helped him to a seated position. Then she moved her hands to beneath his armpits and heaved upward.

Assisted by his own weak efforts, she managed to get him erect.

On snowshoes it was impossible to walk close enough to him to support his weight on her shoulders, for their webs would have become entangled. Moving to his uninjured side, she gripped his right bicep at arm's length.

Even with her help Blake lurched along on his webs like a drunken man, pulling Colleen's slight body off balance every time he reeled away from her. Twice she was unable to keep him from falling, and each time her desperate grip on his arm only served to pull her into a heap on the snow alongside of him.

Both times she managed to get Blake up again, however. He was still erect, though nearly unconscious on his feet when they finally reached the front porch. Afraid that he might collapse before she got him inside, Colleen didn't pause to remove their snowshoes, until they stumbled into the house. She led him to the stairway, where he sat weakly while she took off the snowshoes.

She then helped him upstairs to her bedroom, where he passed out completely just as they reached her bed, falling face forward across it.

Quickly Colleen hurried back downstairs to close and bolt the front door. In the bedroom again Colleen carefully drew the shades before lighting a coal-oil lamp. Then she removed the unconscious man's galoshes and shoes.

Blake was only half on the bed, the upper part of his body across it and his knees on the floor. She was afraid she would injure him further by trying to pull him all the way onto it, so she left him in that position while she went to work on his wound.

Colleen managed to work off his overcoat and suit coat, then cut away his shirt with a pair of scissors. The wound was only a shoulder one, she noted with relief, but it had bled so copiously, his shirt and suit coat were drenched. As there was no exit wound, she assumed the bullet was still in him.

There was a fully-equipped first-aid kit in the bathroom, and after pouring peroxide in the wound, Colleen put on a compress dressing and bound it tightly. Only then did she attempt to get Blake all the way onto the bed.

Colleen managed it after a struggle by lifting his legs and heaving him over on his uninjured side. In the flickering light of the coal-oil lamp his face was so bloodless, it fright-

ened her. She took his pulse and was somewhat reassured to find it weak but steady.

Going into her parents' bedroom, she returned with every blanket she could find and piled them over him as an antidote for shock.

Colleen paused to take a deep breath then, and suddenly realized she was so uncomfortably hot, she was drenched with perspiration. She had been working without even unzipping her heavy ski jacket.

After removing her boots and ski suit, Colleen redressed in jeans, a flannel shirt and low-heeled shoes.

Up to that moment she hadn't had time to wonder what Hank Blake was doing here, or dwell on the now certain knowledge that John Morgan was only two hundred yards away. From the terse explanation the blond man had given as he lay in the snow, she gathered that Blake had been looking for her place and had accidentally knocked on the Levanthal door.

Colleen could only guess at the events that had followed. She assumed that Morgan, or one of his gunmen, had forced Blake to the edge of the creek at gunpoint, had shot him in the back and left him for dead when he tumbled down the bank. Then Blake must have

crawled across the frozen creek and up the opposite bank.

Returning to her post at the front-room windows, Colleen peered in the direction from which she expected the enemy to come. Would Morgan come alone, she wondered, or backed by some of his gunmen? Dubiously she hefted the slim twenty-two rifle, doubting its effectiveness in her inexperienced hands against even one man, let alone against a couple of expert guns.

A long sigh of pain from the bedroom took her back there. The wounded man's eyes had opened, but they were fever-ridden and his previously pale face was flushed.

"Where am I?" Blake asked weakly.

She put a cool hand across his brow and said soothingly. "At my house. You have a bullet in your shoulder, but it's dressed well enough to hold until we can get you to a doctor. How do you feel?"

"Hot," he said. "May I have some water?"

Drawing a glass from the bathroom, Colleen held it for him as Blake raised on one elbow to drink. When he collapsed on his side again, she removed all but one of the blankets she had piled on him and again asked how he felt.

"Still hot," he said.

She knew enough about the dangers of both shock and fever not to uncover him completely. "You'll have to put up with it," Colleen said in a firm tone. "You've lost too much blood to risk a chill."

Blake managed a feeble smile that drifted off into a grimace of pain. She suspected he had a touch of delirium, for although his sparse words up to now seemed sensible enough, there was an odd vagueness about his eyes.

"Morgan," he said with effort. "What's he doing around here? He's supposed to be in Florida."

Colleen said gently, "You'd better not try to talk."

"I would have brought along a posse if I had known he was around here," Blake said, his words coherent enough, but his tone tinged with a dreaminess that heightened Colleen's suspicion that he was beginning to slip into delirium. "When we sent out a pickup on him, word came back that he and Marion Hunter were celebrating Morgan's release by the grand jury with a Miami vacation. We have the Miami police looking for them. Good joke, isn't it?"

The effort of speaking was obviously exhausting him. Colleen said, "You shouldn't try to talk anymore now."

Blake ignored the suggestion. "I tried to phone you Tuesday

night, but the operator said the line was out because of the storm. When it was still out yesterday, I decided to come check on you personally. I got directions here from the Cat-skill postmaster, but picked the wrong house and walked right into Morgan's gun."

"Hush," Colleen said. "You're tiring yourself."

He was too. Blake's voice now showed definite symptoms of delirium as it sank to a low drone. "Three of them. Morgan and Marion Hunter and Nick Satcz. You know big Nick Satcz?"

Colleen paled slightly at the thought of the hulking pseudo-salesman being with Morgan. "Yes," she said.

"Just the three of them," Blake droned on. "Sergeant Klath's in jail, Morgan's other guns under surveillance. If I had a gun—" Fever-bright-eyes studied her as though he had just then remembered her presence, and his voice suddenly became clear. "Do you have a gun?"

"A twenty-two rifle," Colleen said.

"Get it for me."

"I know how to shoot it. You just lie here and rest."

"Get me the gun," Blake insisted. He raised on one elbow. "Where is it? I'll get it myself."

"Stop that," Colleen said,



pushing him down again. "You can't even stand."

He tried to struggle from the bed, only to collapse on his side again. "Gotta get up," Blake muttered deliriously. "Got to get the gun before Morgan comes."

In sudden inspiration Colleen said, "All right. I'll bring it."

Running to her parents' bedroom, she got the useless double-barreled shotgun from the closet. His gaze had dulled so much by the time she returned, he was conscious only that what she handed him was a gun. He snuggled it against his chest as though he were a child hugging a teddy bear. His eyes closed before she tiptoed from the room back to her post at the front windows.

By now it was nearly midnight, and the strain of waiting

for something to happen began to create hallucinations in Colleen's mind. Though actual visibility was limited to no more than fifty feet into the outside darkness, and the bridge spanning the creek was twice that distance from the house, repeatedly she imagined she saw the figures of John Morgan and his huge bodyguard striding toward her across the bridge. The images were so vivid, she found herself shakily raising the rifle to her shoulder at intervals and sighting it at the phantoms.

Mentally taking hold of herself, she forcibly suppressed this overimaginativeness. She didn't succeed in banishing the mirages, but she managed to control her panicky urge to fire at them through the glass.

Finally the clouds screening the moon separated long enough to flood the outdoors with moonlight for a brief moment, bringing the bridge into actual view. In the instant of brightness Colleen saw three figures on snowshoes coming across it. Their dress lent an aura of unreality to the scene, for none wore the outdoor clothing you'd expect to see in mountain country.

Instead they were city-dressed. The slim man in the lead wore a dark topcoat, white neck scarf and a jaunty black

fedora. Behind him loomed a man a full head taller, in a loudly checked overcoat and wide-brimmed gray hat. Trailing them was a woman wrapped in a sleek fur coat and wearing a pert little felt hat with a curling black feather on her blonde head.

As though some switch had been thrown, darkness closed in again, and it was a moment before Colleen's mind could sort this actuality from the imaginative visions she had been having. When it did register on her that what she had seen this time was flesh-and-blood instead of phantoms, she was at first too paralyzed to do anything but strain her eyes into the impenetrable blackness.

Minutes passed before anything at all happened. Then, distinctly, Colleen heard the knob of the downstairs kitchen door rattle.

As snow was piled waist-deep against the door, the outside knob had been buried, which meant her attackers must have dug for it. But their apparent hope to find such an easy method of entrance was a forlorn one, for the door was both locked and bolted.

Silently Colleen ran to the stairs, tiptoed down to the kitchen and pointed her gun in the general direction of the door. The room was in pitch

darkness. A small noise at the window nearest the door shifted her attention. Outside the blacker outline of a man's figure was barely discernible against the gray background.

Without sound she moved to within two feet of the window.

There was just enough light outside for her to make out that the big man in the loudly-checked overcoat squatted on his heels on the other side of the glass. In the dimness his face was a white blur, but the enormous width of his shoulders told her it was Big Nick Satcz. Hovering behind him on either side she could barely make out the figures of the second man and the woman, whom she knew, even without being able to see them distinctly, were John Morgan and Marion Hunter.

Nick Satcz had both gloved palms spread against the lower center pane of the storm window. Colleen put her face to within a foot of the pane before she realized what he was doing. He was carefully criss-crossing the glass with Scotch tape.

A moment later he drew back a gloved fist and drove it sharply forward. There was a slight crunching sound, too slight to have awakened her if she had been upstairs asleep, and the big man quietly removed the shattered pane. His

hand groped through, found the hook of the storm window and unlatched it. The window swung out and up, was lifted from the upper hinges and gently leaned against the side of the house.

The man turned back.

Fascinatedly Colleen watched a repetition of the Scotch-tape trick on the inner window, this time on the small pane just above the latch. When another gloved blow came, the crunching sound was only slightly louder. Cold air drifted into the kitchen as Satcz lifted out the broken glass. Then his oversized hand reached inside to loosen the latch.

Colleen put the muzzle of her rifle to within a half inch of the groping hand and fired.

VIII

WITH A YELL of pain the big man jerked back his hand and threw himself backward. As he floundered in the snow, Colleen stepped to one side of the window, drew back the bolt of the rifle to eject the spent shell and fumbled in her jeans pocket for another.

She was pushing the bolt closed again when a pistol outside began to go off like a machine gun. Broken glass showered into the room as six rapid shots poured through the

window and gouged holes in the floor and opposite wall.

Colleen had reached a stage beyond fear, a state psychologically equivalent to second wind. A kind of desperate calmness settled over her, causing her to react with the automatism of a sleepwalker.

A numb, animal-like reasoning intruded through her terror, telling her it must have been Morgan who fired. The process took place automatically, without conscious thought, her mind telling her that Marion probably didn't have a gun and that Nick Satcz was wounded in the gun hand. Mechanically she counted the shots, and mechanically stepped in front of the window the instant her count reached six.

Her ignorance of guns was a lucky advantage in this case, for Colleen was under the impression that all pistols were six-shot. If it had occurred to her that Morgan might be firing an automatic, she might have hesitated to make sure there would be no seventh. As it was her own gun was aimed upward through the shattered window before the echo of Morgan's last shot died. She caught a glimpse of the still-leveled pistol and fired blindly.

Nick Satcz had scrambled to his feet, his right hand gripped by his left. The shot missed

Morgan, sweeping the wide-brimmed hat from Satcz's head. Abruptly he sat in the snow again, while Morgan leaped to one side.

Flattening herself against the wall next to the window, Colleen quickly reloaded. Outside she heard the scrabbling noise of Satcz getting out of the line of fire, and then there was silence.

She waited, her heart pounding, as minutes seeped by. Cold air through the shattered window invaded the kitchen, but she wasn't even conscious of the growing chill. She strained her hearing, but there was no sound from the enemy.

A crash of glass came from upstairs, and she realized one of the trio had circled the house and smashed the front door pane. Frantically she rushed to the stair door, only to turn and face the window again when a large figure hurtled through it, carrying with it the wooden framework and remaining shards of glass.

In a spasm of fear she pointed her gun at the man who sprawled in the center of the room on all fours, unable to see him but guided by sound. Her finger jerked the trigger, and in the powder flash she saw the heavy face of Nick Satcz staring up at her.

She knew she had missed

even as she fired, had missed at a range of less than six feet. She saw the big man outlined against the square of the window as he rose from the floor between her and it. Despairingly she raised the gun and swung it at him clumsily, like a club.

He couldn't have seen the movement more than dimly, but he seemed to sense it, for the blow caught only an up-raised arm. Then the rifle was wrested from her and hurled across the room. She was jerked completely around and her left arm was twisted up into the middle of her back until she gasped with pain.

The sound of a cautious movement came from the top of the stairs.

Nick Satcz called quickly, "Don't shoot, Johnny. I got her. Turn on your light."

After a pause a flashlight glared from the top of the steps, spotlighting the girl and man at the bottom. Footsteps descended until John Morgan was only two steps above them and Colleen could see his face in the reflected glow. She felt the numb dread of impending death as he calmly aimed the gun in his hand at her head and his finger began to whiten on the trigger.

"Hold it, Johnny," Satcz said.

Relaxing his trigger finger,



Morgan gave the man an inquiring look.

"Before you shoot her, let's find out if she's got anything around here to fix up my hand."

Shrugging, Morgan moved past them into the kitchen. "Hang onto her until I can locate a light, then," he ordered.

He swept his flashlight over the room, spotted the coal-oil lamps on the table and lighted both of them. As light grew in the room, he glanced at Colleen and Satcz, thrust his flashlight into one topcoat pocket and his pistol into the other.

Walking over to the twenty-two rifle lying in the corner where Satcz had hurled it, Morgan stooped, picked it up and drew back the bolt. He looked at Colleen sardonically.

"A single-shot," he said. "A regular pioneer woman."

Laying the rifle on the table, he walked over to the shattered window and called, "Marion!"

A little shakily Marion's voice replied from a short distance away. "Everything all right?"

"Yeah. Come here."

Marion's face appeared at the window. After one glance at Colleen, she avoided looking at her.

"Lift the storm window back on before we freeze," Morgan ordered.

Picking it up from its leaning position against the side of the house, Marion awkwardly raised the storm window until the slots at its top fitted over their respective steel tongues. When she let the bottom edge swing down, Morgan set the hook and spoke to her through the missing pane.

"Go on around and come in the front door. If I open this one, a ton of snow will fall in."

As Marion's face disappeared from the window, Morgan turned his attention to Nick Satcz. "We'll get to your hand as soon as the place warms up a little. Bother you much?"

"It's just numb," Satcz said. "I think it went right through."

All this time Colleen had stood nearly on tiptoe, her back to Satcz and her arm painfully twisted into the center of her back. The man held her with

effortless ease by his unwounded left hand, yet she was as helpless as though she had been bound hand and foot. Suppressing an urge to break into hysterical tears, she stared at Morgan from enormous eyes.

Ignoring her, Morgan said to the big man, "Keep holding her," lifted one of the lamps and exploratively opened the storeroom door.

After a glance in, he disappeared into the room, returned a moment later with an empty cardboard carton. He set both the lamp and the carton on the table and drew a clasp knife from his pocket.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs and Marion came into the kitchen. Colleen stared at her wordlessly, but the blonde girl refused to return the stare.

Looking past Colleen obliquely, she said to Nick Satcz, "I carried your snowshoes around and left them on the front porch with mine and Johnny's."

Then her attention turned to Morgan, who after eyeing the vacant pane in the storm window, began to cut a section of cardboard slightly larger than the missing pane.

"What are you doing?" Marion asked.

"Shutting out the cold air so we can treat Nick's hand in comfort," Morgan said.

With some of the Scotch tape

Satz had used to deaden the sound of breaking glass, Morgan fastened the cardboard over the hole.

Marion asked, "How about the door upstairs?"

Morgan gave her an irritated glance. "I'm not in the weather-stripping business. Who the hell cares if the upstairs freezes? I want a warm room long enough to fix up Nick."

Pointing at a chair, he said to Satz, "Sit her down there." Pushing Colleen toward the indicated chair, Satz swung her around and gave her a slight push which sat her down with a crash. "Make a move off there and I'll slap your head off," he growled at her.

Colleen said nothing. She rubbed on her numbed arm. When Morgan lifted a stove lid and began to build up the fire, she for the first time realized how chilly the room had become. Involuntarily she shivered.

The old-fashioned kitchen range threw a lot of heat, however. By the time Morgan finished his stoking and had the fire roaring, the chill began to dissipate. Unbuttoning his topcoat, Morgan told Satz to hold out his hand.

The hand the big man held out was still gloved, and both

the palm and back of the glove were slippery with blood. As Morgan tugged it off, a steady red stream dripped to the floor. Probing the man's wrist with his thumb, Morgan found the proper vein and applied pressure.

As soon as the blood stopped flowing, Morgan showed Satz the place to hold his thumb, and let him take over the duty himself.

"Now where do you keep your first-aid supplies?" he asked Colleen.

She looked back at him silently, still trembling with chill and fright, but with her face set in stubborn lines.

"Where's your bathroom," Morgan asked.

When Colleen continued to make no answer, Morgan gave her a bleak grin and drew his pistol from his topcoat pocket. With his left hand he drew out the flashlight.

"On your feet," he said. "Get me irked and you'll get it in the belly right now."

Colleen knew he meant it by the cold glint in his eyes. Though she realized it was only a matter of postponement, she hadn't the courage to give up the remaining minutes of her life for a minor matter of principle. Stiffly she came erect, attempting to look disdainful, but spoiling the effect by letting

her mouth quiver. Wordlessly she turned to the stair door.

Morgan stayed only a step behind her all the way up the stairs, his gun to her back and the light probing the darkness beyond her. Until they started up the stairway, fright had made Colleen completely forget Hank Blake in the upstairs bedroom. She said a mental prayer that if she had to die, at least Blake's presence in the house would remain undiscovered, so that he might have a chance for survival. Then, even as she said it, she sickly remembered that a lamp burned in the bedroom, and they had to pass the half-open door to get to the bathroom.

As she feared, Morgan's suspicion was aroused by the light the moment he saw it. Halting her with a curt command, he asked sharply, "What's in there?"

"That's my bedroom," she managed to say without a tremor. "I left the lamp burning."

Morgan hesitated, on the verge of investigating. The half-open door disclosed the kerosene lamp on the dressing table, but the bed was beyond their range of vision.

Colleen said, "The first-aid kit's in the bathroom," and risked a bullet in the back by moving on without waiting for an order.

Apparently the sight of the feminine dressing table in the bedroom reassured Morgan, for he followed without protest. In the bathroom Colleen instructed him to point his light at the first-aid kit bolted to the wall while she removed bandage material and antiseptic.

She thought she had induced him to ignore the bedroom, and as they started past it on the way back, she offered a little prayer of thanks. But her hopes were dashed when Morgan said shortly, "Just a minute."

She stopped and turned to look at him. He motioned toward the bedroom door with his gun.

"What do you want in there?" Colleen asked unsteadily.

"I thought you might like to lie down and rest," he said. "No sense in keeping you up any longer."

She understood then. He wasn't suspicious of the room, for he thought Hank Blake was dead, and had no idea that the blond man had managed to reach the sanctuary of her house. He simply intended to use the bedroom as a murder room.

IX

THE CERTAINTY that death was now only seconds off turned Colleen's legs to water. She

staggered slightly as she moved fearfully toward the half-open door.

Even then a sense of grief for Hank Blake was superimposed over her fear, for Morgan's choice of a room for the crime meant the end of all hope that the blond man's presence in the house might go undiscovered. Slowly she pushed the door open, her gaze seeking the bed across the room.

It was empty, as was the rest of the room, apparently.

Colleen stopped still, staring unbelievably at the rumpled but vacant bed until Morgan prodded her on into the room with his gun. Stiff-legged, she walked in a straight line toward the bed.

Behind them the door gently swung shut.

She was conscious of Morgan behind her swiftly spinning around, and her head jerked back over her shoulder. Slouched against the wall where the door had shielded him from view was Hank Blake. Shoeless, and bare to the waist except for the bandage on his left shoulder, he looked like a dying pirate. His face was deathly pale and he kept his feet only by supreme effort, but there was no longer any sign of delirium in his eyes. And the double-barrelled shotgun leveled from his hip



didn't waver a fraction of an inch.

Morgan's spin stopped when it was half completed, and he froze with his pistol pointing off

at right angles to both Blake and Colleen.

"Just hold that stance," Blake said in a soft voice. "Get out of the line of fire, Colleen."

Though she knew the shotgun was empty, there was such a quietly deadly note in the blond man's voice, it nearly convinced Colleen he had in some miraculous manner produced shells to load it. She scampered aside with alacrity.

Blake's tone had an equal effect on John Morgan. He remained in his frozen position, sweat beading his forehead as he almost visibly braced himself against an expected blast.

There was sweat beading Hank Blake's brow too, but it was from the effort of standing. He was on the verge of collapse, Colleen realized, nothing but will power holding him erect.

Doubting that he could even bring himself to issue a command for Morgan to drop his gun, she darted forward and plucked the pistol from Morgan's nerveless grip. Reversing it, she held it with both hands and pointed it at Morgan's stomach.

With a sigh Hank Blake let the muzzle of his empty shotgun droop toward the floor, when they touched the rug, let the stock slip from his hand. With a subdued thump the gun

fell to the soft carpet. Blake reeled to the bed, sat on it and gripped the edge with both hands to keep himself from falling backward.

For a few moments he sat there panting while the other two formed a rigid tableau, Colleen so tense the slightest movement on Morgan's part would have made her squeeze the trigger, and Morgan so completely aware of this, he was afraid to move a muscle.

Finally Blake recovered enough to say in a weak but steady voice, "Bring it to me, Colleen."

The girl backed toward the bed, the gun unwaveringly pointed at Morgan's midriff. Morgan's eyes followed her, but he moved no other muscle. He looked almost relieved when she transferred the pistol to Blake with a quick motion.

Steadying the gun on one knee, Blake said to Colleen without taking his eyes off Morgan, "What's the situation downstairs?"

"I shot Nick Satcz through the hand," she said. "They're waiting for us to bring down first-aid supplies. Marion's there too."

Blake said, "Open the bedroom door."

Circling so as not to pass between him and Morgan, Colleen obeyed.

"All right," Blake said to Morgan. "Call out to your pals and get them up here. If you don't do it just the way I want it, you get a slug directly in the stomach."

Morgan licked his lips. "What do you want me to say?" he asked huskily.

"Use your own judgment. Just keep it in mind that if anything goes haywire, you won't be around to benefit by it."

Morgan licked his lips again. After studying the bleak eyes of the assistant district attorney, he seemed to decide that his chances in a courtroom would be better than his present chances if he failed to obey. Turning his head toward the door, he called sharply, "Marion!"

They could hear Marion Hunter walk to the foot of the stairs. "Yes?" she called back.

"The first-aid stuff's all up here," Morgan said loudly. "And there's a warm room. Bring Nick on up."

Marion muttered something indistinct, and then they heard her say something in a low voice to Nick Satcz. A moment later two sets of footsteps sounded on the stairs. Colleen stooped to pick up the empty shotgun and pressed herself against the wall next to the door, just in case her assis-

tance might be needed by Blake.

It wasn't. Following the light streaming from the open bedroom door, both Marion and Satcz walked into the room without suspicion. They stopped blankly just inside the door, staring at Hank Blake's leveled gun in consternation.

"Hands against the wall," Blake ordered. "You've been shaken down enough times to know the procedure by heart, Satcz."

With the stoic familiarity of much practice, Satcz faced the wall. Because of his wounded hand he couldn't follow the routine procedure of leaning against his palms. He compromised by placing his clenched right fist against the wall while he continued to press his left thumb into his wrist.

At a gesture from Blake, Morgan placed both hands against the wall next to his bodyguard.

"You too," the blond man snapped at Marion.

Marion's eyes widened, she glanced at Colleen, found no encouragement there, and took her position with the other two.

"I guess you'll have to search them," Blake told Colleen. "I don't think I'm up to it."

Colleen found a .38 automatic under Nick Satcz's arm, but aside from Morgan's clasp knife

there seemed to be no other weapons.

When Colleen laid the automatic and clasp knife next to Blake on the bed, he said, "I guess you're going to have to do the tying up too. Got any clothes line?"

"Downstairs," she said. "I'll get it."

After Colleen had bandaged Nick Satcz's wound and, under the detailed instructions of Blake, had trussed the wrists of all three prisoners behind them, Blake ordered the three to lie on their faces on the floor.

All this time the blond man had remained sitting on the edge of the bed with Morgan's pistol resting on his knees. Though his voice remained steady enough, Colleen had noted that he grew progressively paler. By the time the three prisoners were safely tied up and were helplessly stretched out on the floor, he impressed her as on the verge of fainting.

"I'll stay awake and watch our prisoners," Colleen told him. "You get back in bed. A snowplow should be by in the morning. I'll hail the driver and have him send out the police and a doctor."

"You can't stay up all night," Blake protested weakly.

"It's past one A.M. now, and

the snowplow may arrive before dawn. I couldn't sleep anyway, thinking you might pass out and these three would get loose. Don't give me any more argument."

His protest had only been a matter of form, for he was utterly exhausted. Docilely he allowed her to help him under the covers and roll him onto his uninjured side. She set a chair alongside the bed where she could keep an eye on the recumbent trio and took up her vigil.

"Will the light bother you?" Colleen asked.

Blake shook his head sleepily. Then his eyes momentarily opened wide at a sudden thought, and he smiled.

"In all this excitement you haven't forgotten our dinner date, have you?"

Colleen smiled back. "No, Hank."

His eyes closed again, and she could barely hear him murmur, "There goes one barrier. First time she's called me anything less formal than Mr. Blake."

Blake drifted off to sleep then, but the alertness of Satcz and Morgan helped keep Colleen awake during the night.

At six A.M. Colleen heard the roaring noise of a snowplow entering the lane from Old King's Road.

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OCTOBER, 1974

“A DIFFERENT” STORY”

FREQUENTLY, we receive manuscripts which, though excellent in every respect, do not fit the editorial requirements of the magazine. Usually, such stories, even when exceptionally entertaining, are rejected — with the most sincere of regrets. *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* strives to present its readers with the very best in mystery reading, from classic to contemporary works, within the framework of its editorial policy. Usually, the decision to accept a story is an easy one to make. Being a mystery magazine, we can safely reject science fiction stories, tales of the merely gruesome, westerns, romances, the obscure and the entirely *outré*. Yet ... from time to time we get a story which seemingly meets all of our qualifications, a tale so well told as to be exciting and perfect in every way for publication — in every way but one. It does not fit into the usual mystery, detective, crime format of the magazine. Because of this, such stories are returned to the author by the publisher. After long contemplation, it is now our feeling that this need not be, that such stories, while not entirely within our format requirements, still should entertain our readers, and deserve to be presented to the public, to be read. These stories are too unique to be categorized. They fall under many headings: detective, suspense, mystery, thrillers, the humorous, the grotesque, the supernatural and even witchcraft. They range from novel length to short story length. Yet they all share one thing in common. They are so totally different as to be treasures in the field of fiction. We believe we would be depriving our readers if we did not make a determined effort to publish these stories and give them special attention — headline them, as it were. We have therefore decided to call these stories by the only name which will fit them all — “different.” By presenting such stories, and, in a sense, departing from our former editorial policy and format, the departure is not so drastic as it may seem at first sound. We continue to bring you the very best in mystery reading in *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*: we have, however, concluded that the “best” is sometimes a “different” story. We were as excited with this second story in what we trust will be a long list of distinguished but non-format stories, as we were the first. “Murder Among Witches” brings into play a character long neglected by fiction writers — the logician in the world of the supernatural. It is a superb detective story, written with superlative style. “Murder Among Witches” gives you a detective with the logical faculties of Sherlock Holmes, the humor of Mark Twain and a nice O’Henrian twist on its end. We have warned you. This is, indeed, a “different” story.

MURDER AMONG WITCHES

His aunt's name was Willie, but that wasn't the strangest thing about her. "Willie," the familiar name for Wilhemina, had her own familiars. You see, Aunt Willie was a witch.

by **ROBERT J. RANDISI**

I HAD NEVER met a witch before that day in August. My roomie, Jerry Todd, had received a letter from his aunt asking him to come up to her place in Connecticut, for the weekend.

Todd asked me to go along with him, but I was a bit leery of going where I hadn't been invited. He insisted, however, that I'd be as welcome as he, so in the end I agreed.

While we were packing he said there was something he felt he should warn me about.

"What's that?" I asked him.

"My Aunt," Todd answered.

I laughed. "You want to warn me about your aunt?"

"Well, you see, Dave, she's not, well, normal people."

"You mean she's eccentric?" I asked, trying to understand.

"No, that's not it," he said, slowly. "She's a witch."

I put my hand on his shoulder and said, "As a writer, Jerry, I feel I should meet all types of people. Why should I balk at meeting a witch?"

Naturally, I didn't take Jerry Todd seriously and he didn't

expect me to. It was a joke and we both knew it.

At least, I did...

We had met three months before, while we were both hunting for an inexpensive apartment, and ran into each other. We decided to get together and rent a halfway decent one.

Jerry Todd was the type who took a different job every month. He didn't know what he wanted. He always said he felt he was "destined" for "something" and he'd coast until that "something" came along.

I knew what I wanted and I was working at it. I'd had a few short stories published but I was still waiting for my literary masterpiece to form itself in my brain. Until it did, I was content with my short mysteries.

We drove to his aunt's place in Todd's car. The house was a large mansion type, way the hell out in Connecticut. It was the only house for miles, surrounded by trees.

"The old lady must be filthy rich—I mean rich," I said.

Todd started laughing and I joined him. That slip of the tongue betrayed what I had on my mind. I had shrugged it off when he first told me, but he had seemed so serious that it must have been gnawing at the back of my mind.

"She's been telling me she

was a witch ever since I was a kid. I always thought she was kidding me, but one day I just up and believed her. I guess she'd been telling me for so long that I had to believe her."

He was serious. During the three months I'd known him he hadn't given me any reason to believe he was anything but a normal everyday twenty-one year old American boy. This witch thing was out of the norm, but I decided not to argue the point with him. If he wanted to believe his old aunt was a witch, then let him. I wasn't going to like him any less for it.

Up close the house was very weird looking. There were no electric wires coming from it, so either there was no electricity or the house had its own generator.

"It's beautiful," I said, and it was. Weird, but beautiful.

Todd got out of the car and grabbed both our bags. I followed him to the doors. They were incredibly tall, made of thick oak and there were devils and nymphs carved into them. The little figures seemed real.

I looked into their eyes and I could have sworn they were looking back. Over the doors hung a symbol made up of flames consuming what might have been a mortal soul floating in a river of blood.

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"The Burning Soul," Jerry Todd quoted. "The family crest. It always scared me when I was a kid," he confided. He reached for the bell, one of the old fashioned kind you pull, which was the breast of one little nymph, but he stopped short.

"She won't hear it," he said. "She's out back by the pool."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

He shrugged, smiled and said, "Just a feeling. Let's go."

I followed him around the house, along a winding path through a beautiful overgrown garden. We broke out of the garden onto a large, well tended lawn. In the center of the lawn was a pool. A woman in a red bathing suit, her figure full and youthful, was standing by it. She waved hello, then waved again, in a beckoning motion.

"Who's that?" I asked Todd.

"That's Aunt Willie," he said. He started towards her and I put my hand on his arm.

"Aunt Willie?" I asked. He smiled and said, "Willie, for Wilhemina. Come on."

Closer to "Aunt Willie" I realized she wasn't as young as I'd first thought, possibly ten years older than myself, but she was very lovely. She might not have been a witch, but she sure as hell was a raven-haired enchantress.

"Aunt Willie, this is Dave Ryan," Jerry Todd said, making introductions. "Dave, meet my Aunt Willie."

She laughed and extended her hand. "Glad to meet you, David."

I took her hand, uncertain about what to do with it. I almost made a fool out of myself by kissing it, but I settled for just holding it. It was curiously cold.

"My pleasure, Aunt—er—I mean—"

"You may call me Willie, if you like, or Wilhemina," she said, laughing. "I intend to call you David. Is that all right?"

"That's fine—er—Willie." I realized I was still holding her hand and gave it back. She drew it back to her side, but not before I noticed that the nails were long and painted deep red. I shivered when I thought of them as blood red.

Abruptly, she turned to Jerry Todd and looked at him with fondness.

"I'm glad you came, Jerry. This is a very important weekend for you."

"I know," Todd answered.

"Do you? How?"

She watched him intently as he shrugged and said, "I don't know how."

"Just a feeling," I said before I could stop myself.

"Right," Jerry Todd agreed.

Willie smiled and said, "Very right. Jerry, why don't you take David into the cabana and fit him with some trunks? It's insufferably hot, isn't it?"

We both agreed and I followed Jerry Todd to the other end of the pool to a small cabana.

"What do you think?" Todd asked as we changed.

"She's gorgeous," I said. "When you said we were going to your aunt's place I never expected a . . . a . . . a Willie!"

Todd laughed. "She sure is a doll, isn't she? And she likes you, I can tell. Maybe you can . . ." he winked suggestively.

"What about her husband?"

"Never had one."

A woman as lovely as that never married? Then again, perhaps her house was enough to scare off any prospective husbands.

I wondered idly if Aunt Willie really believed she was a witch.

We left the cabana and spent about ten minutes in the pool, just enough to wash off the sheen of perspiration we'd built up. When we left the water we took our places on beach chairs on either side of Willie. I couldn't help thinking of her as Willie the Witch.

She offered us something cold to drink and we both readily

agreed. The very next moment this funny looking little guy came waddling out of the house with a tray and three glasses. I hadn't seen Willie press any buttons and there were no cords to pull, but this little fella had shown up less than ten seconds after her offer. He was dressed in a suit of green. He had a bald head, a large nose and a smiling mouth.

During my stay there I was never to hear him speak.

We took our drinks from the tray and he waddled back into the house. I don't know whether I expected some strange potion, but what I got was delicious iced tea.

We finished our drinks over some light conversation, mostly about Jerry Todd and what he'd been up to since she'd last seen him.

When the sun began to descend over the treetops we dressed and went in for dinner. Hugo, the little man, served and did remarkably well for someone whose head barely reached the top of the table. Roast beef was on the agenda and it was very good.

After dinner Willie asked me if I played chess and I said yes. We went into the livingroom where a chess set was set up before the fireplace. I took one look at the pieces and a chill went through me. The pawns

were nymphs, the rooks towers with green, red-eyed reptiles encircling them, the knights were serpents heads, the bishops were devils, the queen a witch and the king a warlock. The board was marble, a cloudy grey color with patches of black. It was a magnificent set.

"It's beautiful," I told Willie. "Is it specially made?"

She laughed. "I suppose you could say that. Do you want white, or red?" Blood red, I thought. I don't know why, but that's what I picked. Her nails contrasted sharply against the white pieces as she made her first move. Jerry Todd had said he was tired and had gone to his room. Willie and I played chess by the light of the fireplace, wordlessly, except for an occasional "check".

We played one game, ending in a stalemate.

"It would seem we are evenly matched," Willie said at the end. I agreed. I looked at her lovely face and watched the flames reflect off her hair.

"Are you sleepy?" she asked.

"A bit," I admitted.

It was midnight, the witching hour, when we went up to bed.

II

SUNDAY was fascinating. A tour of the house, conducted by Willie. Todd was off somewhere,

but I didn't mind. My guide was lovely and she smelled good, although once in a while I thought I caught a foreign odor. Perhaps of... smoke and brimstone?

A tour of the woods followed, with Jerry Todd in on it. The three of us walked through the woods, found caves and a lovely crystal-clear waterfall. Willie was tireless but she seemed to know instinctively when I needed to rest for that's when she'd stop.

When we got back to the house Willie asked me if I would like to see the library, the only room she had omitted during the earlier tour.

"As a writer you should appreciate it," she added. I wondered if Jerry had told her I was a writer; I hadn't.

She lit several candles in the library and I actually realized, for the first time, what it meant to have no electricity at all in the house. The flickering light revealed a large, oak desk and four walls lined with books, most of which were on one subject: *Witchcraft*. The whole effect of the room was disquieting.

"I would like to speak to Jerry for a while, David. Do you mind being left alone here?"

As spooky as the place was, no, I didn't mind. I said so.

"Fine." Willie squeezed my hand and started to leave. At the door she turned. "There are things that will happen tonight that you might not understand, David," she warned.

I looked at her a moment and then shrugged. "There are things that happen everyday that I don't understand, Willie."

She smiled and left, closing the door behind her. I stifled the urge to check and see if the door was locked and instead began to prowl the room.

The bindings on the majority of the books were old and dusty. I'd never heard of any of the authors. I slid books out and scanned them. The pages were yellowed, but remarkably readable. I came upon incantations, spells and many facts about witches that I hadn't known.

Facts?

Was I starting to believe?

I was alone in the room for two hours and I learned more about witches than I ever thought I'd know. Witches and warlocks were another civilization, like cavemen or martians.

Were there cavemen?

Are there Martians?

Who's to say there's no such thing as witches and warlocks?

I read about witch's imps. Each witch is supposed to have one. Was Hugo Willie's imp? I

read about witch families and that started me wondering about Jerry Todd.

What had Willie meant when she said this was an important weekend for him?

Damn! I was wondering about Willie, about Jerry Todd. I even started to wonder about myself!

Willie sure didn't look like a witch, but then, when was the last time I'd seen one?

That old line, "Which witch is which", came into my mind and I shut the book I was reading and slapped it back into place. I rubbed my eyes and wondered what things would happen that night that I wouldn't understand.

I saw a pedestal in the corner of the room and on it was the thickest book I'd ever seen. I walked over to it and saw that the binding was covered with dust. I rubbed away a portion of the dust with my hand and saw strange lettering on the cover, unlike any I'd ever seen before.

I tried to open the book, but couldn't. There was no lock on the cover, but I couldn't budge it. Suddenly I became very cold. I went to the window and saw that it was dark out. I checked my watch but it wasn't working.

"It's seven-thirty," Willie said from behind me.

I turned quickly, very startled.

"Did I startle you, David? I'm so sorry." She was dressed in a filmy red gown with a high collar and sleeves ten times too big. She was beautiful.

"Are you starting to believe?" Willie asked.

"Yes," I said, the word jumping from my mouth on its own.

"Good. Go upstairs and dress for dinner, David. We'll be having guests for dinner tonight and they'll be arriving shortly.

Walking upstairs I wondered what guests were coming.

I'd find out soon enough. In my room I changed into a suit I found on my bed. It was a perfect fit and I was glad it wasn't red. I think if it had been red I would surely have gone screaming from the house.

Anyway, it was black.

I went back downstairs in time to see Willie admitting a gentleman in a black suit and cape. He was tall and well put together, seemed to be about fifty-five. He gazed up at me briefly and I saw that his eyes were a curious mixture of yellow and green. He pecked Willie's cheek and went on into the livingroom. She turned and saw me.

"It fits," she said as I came down the rest of the way. "I'm so glad. You look very handsome."

"Thank you."

"Oh, you poor dear," Willie said, putting a cool hand to my cheek. "You're confused, aren't you? You don't know what to think."

"Right on both counts."

"You'll be fine. You're brave."

"Curious," I corrected her.

"All right then, curious." She slipped her arm through mine and we walked to the livingroom.

"Willie?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Did you have anything to do with my being here?"

"No, I didn't, David. You're here because you're Jerry's friend, because he asked you to come. He didn't fully understand why he was coming."

"Why was he coming?" I asked.

She patted my arm. "You'll know soon, David. Very soon, I promise."

"You've outdone yourself this time, Willie," the fine gentleman in the cape said as we entered the livingroom. "It's enchanting," he added, indicating the room, or the whole house, with a sweep of his arm.

His voice was a deep bass, his hair iron grey and thinning, but he cut a dashing figure still.

"Thank you, Waldo. I'd like you to meet David Ryan."

"Is he one of the chosen?" he

asked. I felt my reception depended on the answer.

"He is a friend of Jerry's," Willie said, "and mine."

"Glad to meet you, my boy," he boomed, extending his hand. "Any friend of Willie's, as you mortals say."

I tried not to notice that, but I didn't succeed too well.

"David, this is Count Waldo von Brunner."

We shook hands; his grip was firm. Looking into his eyes was an experience. I got that same impression of yellow and green, only stronger up close.

"Another guest," Willie said suddenly.

I hadn't heard a bell, but I'd given up wondering how she did certain things. She went to the door, leaving me with the Count.

"Have you known Wilhemina long, my boy?" he asked.

"Only since yesterday, sir," I answered. The "sir" rolled off my tongue by itself. He liked it.

"Ah, respect. You don't get that from the young anymore. I've known her for a long, long time. She's quite a young witch."

Willie came back leading two more guests. One was a young man—warlock—who seemed to be about twenty-two or three. The other was a woman—witch—about ten years older than the Count, although,



when she was in her early thirties, she might have been as beautiful as Willie.

I wondered briefly if my age estimates might be off a few years—or a few hundred.

The younger fellow cocked an eyebrow at me and said, "A mortal?" the way you might say. "A dead rat?" upon finding one in the middle of your living-room.

"David Ryan, this is Jerry's cousin, Albert."

He made no move towards me so I stayed put. The older woman was introduced as Willie's "Aunt Agatha". I suspected the Count of some similar kinship. This was turning out to be a family affair.

All-in-all, six more guests ar-

rived, making a total of nine. Willie, Jerry Todd and myself made twelve. The others were more cousins of Willie's and Jerry's. From the reading I'd done in the library I thought I had the occasion figured out. As far as I could see, this was sort of a coming out party for Jerry Todd.

We sat down to dinner and Todd made his entrance. He was different, changed. He wasn't the same cocky, hip guy I'd come here with yesterday. He was more subdued. He was dressed in a black suit much like mine, only with a higher collar. He greeted the people around the table and was greeted warmly in return by all but Cousin Albert.

Todd took his seat and dinner began—and so did conversation.

"Tell us about yourself, my boy," the Count asked me.

"There isn't much to tell, really."

"Well, what do you do?" he pushed on.

"I'm a writer."

"Indeed. What do you write?"

"Short stories. Murder mysteries, crime—"

"Now there's something I've always been fascinated by," Cousin Albert broke in.

"Murder, Albert?" the Count asked.

"Mortal preoccupation with

murder, Uncle Waldo," Cousin Albert answered dryly. He directed himself to me. "What is it about murder that so enchants you mortals?"

"I'm not enchanted by murder," I said.

"You write about it, do you not?" Aunt Agatha asked.

"I do."

"Mustn't you be enchanted by a subject to write about it?" she asked. Her questions were honest, Cousin Albert's were smart-aleck.

"You must be *interested*," I corrected, trying to make her understand the difference. "I am interested in showing how murders are committed, how murderers are uncovered."

"Have you ever committed a murder?" asked Cousin Albert.

"I have not."

"Then how can you write about it?"

"You are trying to start an argument, Albert," accused Willie. "I will not have that."

"I am merely having a discussion, dear Wilhemina. I don't like mortals, but they fascinate me nevertheless."

"I don't mind answering," I spoke up. Willie smiled at me.

"David is an excellent writer," Todd offered, coming to my defense. "His plots are intricate and ingenious." I had never heard Todd speak that way. He was never so eloquent.

"I fail to see how you can write convincingly about something you've never done," Cousin Albert insisted.

"I've researched—"

"Pah! Researched! Have you ever solved a murder?" he sneered.

"Only on paper," I admitted.

"Then how can you—"

"Where is this discussion getting us, Albert" the Count asked.

"It's not getting you anywhere, Waldo," Cousin Albert answered, "You simply sit there stuffing your face greedily, as usual."

Count Waldo dropped his fork and snapped, "Have a care how you speak to me, sibling!"

"Oh, do calm down, Waldo. Your face is turning red," Cousin Albert told him. This infuriated the Count even more. I don't know what might have happened if Willie hadn't intervened.

"To use a mortal phrase, Albert, why the hell don't you shut up!" she snapped, crisply.

Cousin Albert just cocked an eyebrow and levitated a salt shaker across the table to his waiting hand. I watched it float across the table and I was shocked. Up until then they could have all been a bunch of harmless kooks playing at witches and warlocks. The salt shaker made me realize, for the

first time, what I was in the midst of.

He used the shaker and then sent it down the table back to where it had been—in front of my plate. I reached out to touch it.

"Don't tell me our mortal is a Doubting David," Cousin Albert laughed. No one else did. They seemed surprised at my surprise.

"It never occurred to me," the Count said, "Willie, doesn't he know who we are?"

"And what we are, Waldo. It's just something he must get used to. He is mortal, you know," Willie reminded him.

"Yes, but he seemed so calm," the Count went on. "I thought he knew and accepted."

"I do," I assured him. "I do know. But it seems to me that I am the one who should be accepted. I'm the different one."

"Not really, David. Not different. We're all basically the same. It's just that we have something you haven't, just as you have something we do not," Willie told me, gently.

"Such as?"

"We have our witchcraft, you have your writing talent. We do not despise you because you cannot levitate a salt shaker and, I suspect, you do not despise us because we cannot write."

Around the table they nodded

their agreement—all but Cousin Albert.

"Do you mean," he asked them, "that you actually agree with that drivel? He's a mortal. We're ten times better than him."

I stared at him and then back at Willie.

"Yes, David, we have our bigots just as you have yours. Albert represents a minority of us, just as your mortal bigots are a minority among you. There are, and have been, bigots in every generation and civilization."

"What?" shrieked Cousin Albert, outraged. "You dare to belittle me in front of a mortal? You have the—"

I'm not really sure what happened then. I didn't see a blow land, the Count simply made a sweeping motion with his arm and Cousin Albert was flung back in his chair.

"That will be all, Albert. I think perhaps we are all very tired of you, now," he said.

Again they agreed around the table—and dinner was soon over.

III

EVERYONE was collecting in the livingroom and Jerry Todd patted me on the shoulder as he went by to join them. I walked with Willie.

"I'm proud of the way you conducted yourself, David."

"Thank you. Tell me something?" I asked.

"Of course."

"Am I right in assuming this is Jerry's coming out party tonight?"

Willie laughed and said, "In a way, yes." Then she turned serious. "All right, David. Very quickly, before we go in, I'll explain."

"Jerry's mother, my sister, fell in love with and married a mortal. This is not as unheard of as it once was, but this instance was somewhat different from others. There have been few cases such as this.

"My sister wanted to live as a mortal, so she gave up her witchcraft." Nothing in Willie's face or tone betrayed her feelings. Her tone was without expression. "She allowed herself to be stripped of her powers, thereby denying any children they might have—in this case, Jerry, their only child—of his heritage.

"Children of—well, let's call them mixed marriages—children of mixed marriages must live until their twenty-first birthday as mortals, then they come of age and gain their powers, slowly, until they learn to use them. Jerry was denied this right, he was denied his powers, but he shall be given

his mother's powers, here, to-night."

"What happened to Jerry's parents?"

"They died in an auto accident. If my sister had retained her powers she would have been able to save herself and her husband, but..." Willie spread her hand, palms up. "Now go into the livingroom, David. I must get something from the library."

I went into the livingroom with the others, but sat in a corner, away from the circle they had formed in the middle of the room. I was not a participant, I was an observer. I wondered idly if any other mortal had ever observed what I was about to.

Willie entered the room, carrying the book I'd been unable to open, let alone carry. There was a space in the circle they formed and she closed it off. She stood with the book in her hands and then there was a puff of white smoke and the pedestal the book had been on appeared. When she started to open the book I had the urge to warn her that it was impossible, but she used only one finger.

She began to read from the book. I couldn't understand the words, but I listened intently anyway. What she read, sometimes they repeated. Jerry Todd

was in the middle of the circle, just sitting there with his legs crossed, on the floor. His eyes were closed. They made motions with their hands and arms and they chanted...

...and then they were silent.

Jerry Todd rose and walked to stand before his Aunt Willie. She took something from within the folds of her gown and held it up. It was a ring, with a blood red stone that shone with incredible brilliance. She placed it on her nephew's index finger, right hand, and chanted, in English:

*The essence of your mother
contained in this ring
will make you a brother:
this is your birthright!*

Jerry Todd made a fist of the hand with the ring and held it high above his head. The ring shone even brighter for a few seconds and then dimmed completely. Todd returned to the middle of the circle and knelt there, while the others chanted. Then he rose, strode right past me without seeing me, right out of the room. I heard him on the stairway. He was going to his room.

"And now we must all retire and when we awake another member will have been added to our family," Willie told them. "Good-night."

They all filed out of the room and up the stairs. Willie closed

the book, dispatched the pedestal in another puff of white smoke and came towards me.

"Wait here," she said.

I waited. She was gone a moment, then returned empty handed.

"What did you think?" Willie asked as we ascended the stairs.

"It was beautiful."

"You're very sensitive, David."

We stopped at my door and said good-night. I went in and went to bed.

It was midnight. I fell asleep immediately...

The shots awakened me.

I don't know how many there were; it might have even been just one. All I know is I snapped awake as the echo of a shot was fading away. Suddenly I felt cold and dizzy. I covered my face with my hands and when I dropped them I was no longer in bed. I was in Jerry Todd's room, surrounded by Wilhemina, Count von Brunner, Aunt Agatha, Cousin Albert and the others.

Willie pointed to the bed. I looked and saw Jerry Todd, naked to the waist, his chest matted with blood.

"He's dead," Willie whispered.

"We brought you here so that you could prove to us that you

did not kill him," Count Waldo added.

I turned my head away from the body, trying to keep the contents of my stomach where they belonged.

"He was my friend," I said when I was able to.

"Not enough," the Count told me.

"Why me?" I asked.

"You are the only one who would have to use a pistol," the Count explained, indicating the gun at my feet.

"Precisely why it couldn't have been me," I told them. I was trying to remain calm so that I could explain. "I would be stupid to kill Jerry with a gun, since the only logical suspect would be me. Am I that stupid?"

"He makes sense," Aunt Agatha admitted.

"Are you suggesting that one of us killed him?" the Count asked in icy tones.

I thought I knew who the guilty party was, there was no real mystery about that. The only difficulty I might have was proving it to their satisfaction.

"May I examine the gun?" I asked.

He thought a moment, then nodded. I knew a little about guns, having researched them from time to time. This one looked like a .38 Colt revolver.

I spun the cylinder, cocked the hammer, pointed the gun at Cousin Albert and pulled the trigger.

Nobody jumped or screamed. The hammer fell with a dull click and that was it. I was sure none of them had used witchcraft to keep it from firing, so my conclusion was correct.

"What does that prove?" the Count asked.

"This gun has no firing pin," I told him. I'd noticed that while examining it. "No gun can fire without a firing pin, as I've just demonstrated—unless it's by witchcraft."

"Again you intimate one of us—" Count Waldo began, but I stopped him.

"When Albert created this gun he did so without any knowledge of guns, or he would not have neglected to create a firing pin."

"How dare you!" Cousin Albert snapped.

"Also, there's the time it took all of you to get here," I went on, ignoring him. "I heard the shot, woke up and the next moment I was here. You obviously arrived here very shortly after the shot was fired. I could not have gotten out of this room fast enough to avoid every one of you. I would have to run out the door and down the hall to mine. Albert, how-



ever, doesn't have any such limitations. He could have just—" I snapped my fingers "—disappeared."

"What about—what is it?—motive?" the Count asked.

"You all remember the discussion at dinner. Albert was trying to prove I couldn't solve a murder. Well, I have."

"Couldn't any one of us created the gun and gotten out of here just as quickly?" Willie asked.

"Yes, but my choice is still Albert, for the simple reason that he is the only one here who hasn't had his powers long

enough to realize that they are not something to be misused, as they were here tonight. I think the rest of you have too much pride to do such a thing."

"Oh, Snakes!" Cousin Albert exploded. "So you proved what? I—"

"Silence, Satan damn you!" I barely recognized Willie's voice. It thundered into Cousin Albert and shocked him into silence.

"What about Jerry?" she asked. "What about my nephew?"

"I think I may have the answer," I told her. They all looked at me. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but is it true that none of you can undo the other's witchcraft?" I asked. The Count nodded. It was something I read while in the library. "But your witchcraft can effect each other?" Again Waldo nodded. "If you were to strip Albert of his powers, wouldn't everything he had done be undone?"

"It would indeed," the Count affirmed.

"No, you can't do that!" Cousin Albert cried out. "There's another way. I'll banish the gun, and by doing so banish the bullets in Jerry. That will erase their effect. He'll simply be asleep again."

The Count looked at Willie and asked, "Which way?"

She looked from the frightened Albert to the Count and,

indicating Cousin Albert, said, "His."

The Count looked at him and said, "Do it."

Cousin Albert pointed to the gun, which I had laid back on the floor, snapped his fingers and it disappeared in a puff of black smoke. When I looked at Todd the blood was gone and he was asleep.

He'd been dead fifteen minutes.

The Count looked at Willie and she nodded. They both turned to Cousin Albert. He cried out, "No!" but they waved their arms and he disappeared.

"He will be punished," the Count said. "You knew that if you proposed that we strip Albert of his powers he would willingly undo what he had done," the Count went on.

"Yes."

"How?"

"His type are all alike: Cowards."

"True," agreed the Count. "You were quite right about Albert. He doesn't have enough pride in his powers to use them wisely. He may have to be stripped of them after all. Perhaps you would like them? You would make better use of them, I'm sure."

"No, thank you."

Count Waldo raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Why not?"

I thought of a few answers,

some offensive, some not, but in the end I simply said, "You have your heritage, I have mine."

"Well said," whispered Willie, as if just realizing that Todd was simply asleep. "I propose we all retire for the remainder of the night."

We did and, for some reason, I was glad it wasn't midnight.

IV

WHEN I AWOKE in the morning my first thought was, what a funny dream I had. My second thought was, but was it?

I forced myself to get up and find out. I went down to breakfast prepared to see the Count, Aunt Agatha and the rest.

There was only Willie and Jerry Todd.

Todd looked well-rested, not at all like someone who had been fifteen minutes dead. As we ate breakfast nobody mentioned anything about witches or guns or anything. I glanced at Todd's finger; there was no ring.

The day was spent mostly by the pool and it went rather quickly. I had a few anxious moments when Todd came out in his swimming trunks, but there was no sign of a scar on his chest.

After dinner it was time to leave—or so I thought.



"I'm staying a while longer, Dave," Todd told me. "You take the car." He handed me the keys and carried my bag to the car.

"Come again, David. You play chess well," Willie told me.

"Thank you for a very interesting weekend, Willie," I said, a bit awkwardly.

She laughed. "You're very welcome, David."

"I'll see you soon, buddy," I said to Todd.

"Sure, Dave." He sounded sad.

I started down the driveway and turned to wave but they weren't there. Had they gone back in already? I had an urge to go back and check, but I hit the gas and didn't let up until I was twenty miles away.

When I reached my apartment it was long after dark. I went upstairs and flopped into bed.

I woke the next morning feeling refreshed. I'd slept well. I turned on my back and yelled, "Time to hit the deck!"

Then I realized Jerry Todd hadn't come back with me. I looked at his bed—and cried out involuntarily. It was gone!

No bed! I hopped out of mine and stared at the floor where the bed had stood. Not even any little round marks where the legs had been. I couldn't

understand it. It had been there last night, hadn't it?

I didn't even remember.

I checked his closet and his dresser drawers; they were empty. The car! I looked out the window; it, too, was gone. I checked my key ring for the keys he'd given me; gone.

I dressed quickly and made a phone call to a friend of mine. He agreed to loan me his car. I picked it up and headed for Connecticut.

I couldn't find Willie's mansion!

I drove around for hours, checking landmarks and finally got out of the car and stood where I knew the door had been. Could a whole house have been moved without leaving any trace? There was no sign of a pool having been filled in. The lawn was gone and so was the garden. The area had simply become another part of the woods.

I walked deeper into the woods and found the same caves, the same rock formations, the same crystal clear waterfall. I knew I had the right place.

The house had vanished!

Willie had vanished!

Jerry Todd had vanished!

Had my sanity vanished?

I drove back to New York and asked our landlord if he'd seen Jerry Todd. He said who,

and I said, Jerry Todd, my roommate. He looked at me like I was crazy, told me he'd never heard of no Jerry Todd and if I had someone living up there with me all this time then I owed him money for three months double occupancy.

It was as if Jerry Todd had never existed. I called every place I knew of that he had worked and they all said they never heard of him.

Count Waldo, Aunt Agatha, Cousin Albert and maybe even Willie, I could have dreamed them, but not Jerry Todd. He was real, and if he was real, then the rest of them were real, and if they were real then everything that happened was real.

If all that was true, then the only thing I could think of was that Jerry Todd had now gone off with his own people and they had erased any memory of him from the minds of anyone who had ever come in contact with him.

Except me.

After I'd resigned myself to the fact that Todd was gone I went back up to our—my—room and got out my typewriter. I wrote the whole story

down and sent it to my agent and he sold it. The story received praise and I was heralded as a promising young writer.

I think this is why Jerry Todd's existence wasn't erased from my mind. He had probably talked Willie into it, knowing that when I got over the initial shock I'd put it all down on paper. He knew me that well. I guess I should be grateful to him but all I can think of is that I miss him.

I miss him.

You know, I still could have believed it was all a dream if it weren't for something I received in the mail, months after the story had been published in the magazine.

It was a package wrapped in brown paper and with it came a card. All the card said was: CONGRATULATIONS.

I opened the package and stared down at them. I picked them up one by one. They were all there: nymphs, reptile ridden towers, serpent heads, devils, witch and warlock.

And the marble board, grey with black patches.

And the more I looked at the witch-queen the more it looked like Wilhemina.

BUY "MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE" EVERYWHERE

THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION

by

SYD HOFF

He'd tried six times before,
and now the dizzy depths of a
fatal success lay below . . .

THE MAN on the ledge had been out there at least an hour, seemingly oblivious of the excitement below, when the various police officials who had been trying to interrogate him withdrew their heads and a newcomer appeared at the window.

"Hi, I'm Dr. Zillman, the city psychiatrist," he announced, adjusting the thick-rimmed glasses on his nose.

"Go away, I didn't send for any shrink," said the man on the ledge.

"Nevertheless, please try to understand, sir, when a person gets the idea in his head to commit an act such as yours, it automatically becomes the concern of the entire metropolitan area."

The doctor scanned a report handed him by one of the police



officials, without turning away from the window.

"Mr. Doscher, Edward D. Doscher? Is that your true name, sir, the one you gave the officers?"

"It's as true as anything else in life, I guess."

"Ah, I see that the woman to whom you were married for twenty-six years ran off with a door-to-door brush salesman recently, Mr. Doscher."

"Yeah, the slut, she did exactly that."

"I also see that you admitted making some rather unwise investments in the stock market, to the tune of several thousands of dollars."

"That's correct too, doc. My entire life's savings."

There was a minute's silence between them, the doctor studying his watch and the scene in the concrete canyons. A few pigeons roosting nearby occupied the attention of the man on the ledge.

"Well, go ahead and start telling me the same line of bull as the others," said Mr. Doscher finally, grinning.

"What bull?" asked Dr. Zillman.

"That before long my loving wife will realize what a great husband I've been and come running back to me, begging forgiveness; that the vagaries of the stock market are well-

known and if I just had a little patience those investments of mine will probably pay off a hundred-fold eventually."

Dr. Zillman glanced at his watch again and cleared his throat. "No, sir, I'm afraid I am not about to tell you any of those things."

"You're not? How come? Isn't that the course of action you psychiatrists usually take in cases like mine?"

"That's perfectly correct, sir, but surely you're aware of how serious the traffic problem has become in this city lately. The news media has been discussing practically nothing else for months, in fact."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Just look at that tie-up down there; absolute chaos—cars, people, everybody waiting for you to make up your mind about jumping, and it isn't even the rush hour yet."

"I still don't get it."

"According to our computers, Mr. Doscher, you've done this before, a half-dozen times to be exact. Isn't that so?"

"Yeah. Even as a kid death fascinated me. While my friends were playing ball, I wanted to turn on the gas at our house, or drop a radio in my bathtub."

"Well, Mr. Doscher, I'm afraid your fascination nowa-

days is for high places, right here in the downtown area, usually. In my opinion, your indecision about ending your life will go on endlessly. If we get you off this ledge today, you'll be back on another ledge tomorrow, or the day after that."

"But you must help me any way! It's your duty," said the man on the ledge, holding out his hand in sudden terror.

"Not if it means continually slowing up transportation and causing many of our taxpayers inconveniences," said Dr. Zillman.

He took the man's hand in his own, as if to draw him to safety, but instead gave it a slight, almost imperceptible twist that sent Mr. Doscher hurtling off into space, as if he had lost his balance.

Dr. Zillman watched for a while after the body hit the ground and traffic slowly began

resuming its usual pace up and down the avenues, back and forth across town on the side streets. Then he turned to the others, making a final notation on the report that had been handed him.

"Gentlemen, it's against all the ethics of my profession to goad human beings into self-destruction, rather than helping them," he said, "but I thoroughly agree with the urgency of the situation, as do the rest of you."

He placed the report carefully inside an attache case, adjusted the glasses on his nose once more and followed the police officials out of the room, into an elevator, down twenty floors to the street.

Soon, each man was going about his business, doing exactly what each one had been carefully trained to do for his city.

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A Tale to Rival Edgar Allen Poe

by PHILIP HALDEMAN

A Life of Her Own



by DONALD EMERSON

*The victim had helped her to commit the perfect murder,
and now the doctor had done his part — hadn't he?*

MYRA RADFORD took a swig from the bottle she kept in her dressing table before she adjusted the veil of her mourning costume.

She left the bottle on the table. It was her house now, and she'd be rid of the snooping housekeeper before morning. The nurse had already left. Myra got her out of the house the afternoon Gregory died.

Myra was still tense. It hadn't been easy to see Gregory go the way he did. But two years of marriage to a terminal case hadn't been easy, either, let alone the year before she could get him to marry her.

There was just this last ride to the chapel, and then Myra would have a life of her own. She adjusted the stole of mutation mink as she went out to

meet Doctor Ander. The fur was as soft as the life she was going to have now.

Paul Ander was standing in the marble-squared hall with his hat in his hand, like a schoolboy waiting for his date. But he was no schoolboy. Pink cheeks and white hair couldn't soften the sharp black eyes that Myra could feel going right through her.

"Well, Myra," he said briskly.

He doesn't even pretend, Myra thought. Gregory's oldest friend! Even if he doesn't like me, he could act as though he cared about Gregory.

"I'm ready, Paul." She spoke slowly, with a slight tremor.

She caught the tightening of his mouth. She'd seen it before, in the months after the marriage when she still tried to talk to people who came to see Gregory. She could tell from the tightening when she'd said something wrong. When she couldn't stand it any longer she left them to talk alone.

But what had she said wrong now?

She didn't know. She didn't care. She had never belonged in Gregory's world. Was she supposed to act cheerful on her way to a service that wasn't even a decent funeral?

She took Paul's arm because she supposed she had to, but after the smooth young man

from the funeral home closed the door of the car she sat back in her own corner, glad that her veil was like a screen.

"Beautiful autumn day," Paul Ander said. "Greg would have loved it. He always said it was the best time of year. Or of life."

Myra looked out of the window to keep from having to look at Doctor Ander. She had started thinking of him as *Doctor* Ander again. He was certainly no friend of hers.

The afternoon glowed yellow through the maples, but Myra was seeing instead the way Gregory looked at her before he died. He knew. He thought she hated him.

But she didn't hate him. She'd never hated him. He just lived too long while the years were slipping away until at last she couldn't wait any longer. She wanted a life of her own.

She was crying when Doctor Ander signed the death certificate and had the body taken away. Whether his mouth tightened then she didn't know. She was frightened, even though she'd used only an overdose of the medicine.

But he made the arrangements as he said Gregory had asked him to. He wrote the announcement for the papers. She couldn't prevent him from taking her to the memorial ser-

vice. There wasn't any family, with Gregory's first wife dead years ago, and the son frozen to death on some mountain he was climbing.

The money came from that first wife, and Gregory didn't even know how to spend it. He stayed in the hospital doing medical research right up to the time of his attack.

And afterwards, at home, he kept on reading. He wrote letters to people in places Myra never even heard of. He talked into a tape recorder.

But she got him. He couldn't have many visitors, and he could work only short hours. He liked to have her near, and she pretended interest in his slow, rambling talk. She even came to like parts of the quartets he asked her to put on the hi-fi.

Myra glanced at Doctor Ander and quickly looked away. He was staring at her. Her fingers twitched, and she wished she had the knitting that had kept her from wringing her hands with boredom during the hours she had spent with Gregory.

The car was passing the campus now, and she looked across the green lawns toward the university hospital. She clenched her hands. He had planned to leave everything to the hospital.



Myra changed his mind. She even felt a cold, triumphant smile on her lips as she thought how Doctor Ander must dislike her for that. But when she turned to him, he was putting a cigaret into a long filter holder.

"Will you have one?"

She shook her head. She wanted a cigaret, but she wanted even more to keep the veil over her face. He frightened her.

She wanted to be away from him, from all of them, free to live her own life with enough money to really enjoy life.

The car turned into a shadowy side street where trees arched over the road. "You should have made Gregory go into the hospital," she said. She knew it would hurt, for she'd heard Doctor Ander call back from the doorway, the last time he saw Gregory alive, "I ought to put you in the hospital."

Myra hadn't given him the chance.

Doctor Ander looked at her now with that tight face she could never read. But Myra felt her power more than her fear. He couldn't touch her now, and he couldn't take anything away from her.

She saw Dean Twining and his wife on the sidewalk as the car swung into the drive and stopped at a side entrance. And

there were others. She thought she saw the turban of the Indian doctor who visited Gregory the week before, and the small bearded Frenchman who talked with his hands.

Gregory's friends! She never wanted to see any of them again, especially the women. They were all like that Doctor Wilton, who looked as though she'd never had her hair done in her life, and who tried to talk to Myra about natural childbirth and ethical culture.

"You won't have to see people," Doctor Ander said, as though he could read her thoughts. "We'll be off to one side."

He offered his arm. Myra refused to touch him, even though she had to lift her veil as they walked down a dark passage to the chairs set apart from the others.

She could hear the others. There was a low sound of voices, and the shuffling of people on hard seats. The place must be full.

When Doctor Ander looked at her again, she pulled the veil once more over her face. She wished she could go to sleep. She counted the hours until she could go away. Gradually she relaxed in the deep comfortable chair.

Someone whispered to Doctor Ander. Myra glanced around.

without interest as Doctor Ander said sharply, "Wait till after the service!"

Then there was the music of a string quartet playing something slow and mournful that Myra recognized as one of Gregory's favorites. She even liked it herself. It made her think how sweet life would be now she had everything she wanted. She could have cried with relief.

She had never understood Gregory or his friends. They talked about research, and when they travelled they went to see hospitals. They read books she couldn't understand and had parties where all they did was talk. The ones who went to church went to places without even preaching. When they died they were cremated.

Myra knew even before Gregory's death that she would never have to see him again after the body left the house. He wouldn't have a procession of people to some funeral home, he said, and he wouldn't have a funeral. If the living wanted to reassure themselves, that was all right; at least *he* wouldn't have to listen to a memorial service.

Myra remembered how fast she had knitted to keep from saying anything when he talked that way. But after he promised about the money, she

hardly listened. She didn't understand, and she didn't want to. It sounded unnatural to her.

The lawyer and Doctor Ander talked to Gregory. The housekeeper and Doctor Ander witnessed the new will. Myra put the matter from her mind. She knew she could trust Gregory's promise.

But she always shivered when she remembered how Gregory laughed one afternoon as he said to Paul Ander, "I'll have none of your crude autopsies!"

The music ended and after a pause Dean Twining began to read poetry.

It was something about Life itself going on though each life ends.

Myra felt her own life was just beginning. She wondered if Doctor Ander expected her to cry.

He was staring straight ahead, and the man who had spoken to him was leaning against a pillar off to one side, with his hands in his pockets.

Myra was impatient for the service to end. Someone she'd never seen took Dean Twining's place and began talking about "Our absent friend." Myra only half listened. She didn't care about Gregory's years of study or the discoveries which were supposed to have made him famous. She'd never even heard

of him until after Ben threw her out and she had to find a place to live.

And she knew better than the mush-mouthed speaker what Gregory's years of enforced retirement were like. They weren't fun.

Myra promised herself fun from now on. She even smiled to herself as she looked around at Doctor Ander to see how he was taking it.

He was taking it with his frozen face turned full to her, and though Myra wanted to look away she could not. He stared as though he could see through the veil, and Myra felt a tightness in her breathing.

She heard the speaker saying something about Gregory's last gesture toward humanity in offering his remains to medical research. She felt Doctor Ander's hand clamp down on

her arm as she tried nervously to rise.

She knew now why there was no lying in state, and why Doctor Ander ordered the body out of the house almost before the ink was dry on the death certificate.

She knew she could never claim the overdose was an accident. Not the amount she'd given him.

"He said he didn't want an autopsy," she whispered fiercely. "And you were his friend!"

Then she remembered Gregory's laugh. It was the kind of joke she had never understood.

But she understood why Doctor Ander's lips were tight with contempt, and why the tall, heavy man was waiting. It was no joke at all.

Myra began to cry.



ATTENTION—WESTERN FANS

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ZANE GREY WESTERN MAGAZINE



Roses for Patricia

by
**PAUL
YAWITZ**

*He had bought them as a gift for
his wife—but they gave him an
idea which might save his life . . .*

EACH PASSING moment in the squalid attic apartment of the old house on upper Broadway steamed with a frenzy. Every front page in the country was speculating about the desperate incident with over-sized type, and broadcasters were electrified with the situation.

Johnny Brooks, a young cop from a mid-Manhattan precinct was being held hostage by attackers who waylaid and kid-

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napped him on his way home after finishing his eight-hour car-duty in the corrosive thoroughfares of his downtown patrol.

He had been celebrating his fifth year on the force with a single bottle of beer in a Brooklyn bar on his way home. His two off-duty companions had offered to drop him at his door, but Brooks had been driving with a nervous foot on his accelerator all day. He wanted to walk. Besides it was his birthday, too, and he intended to stop off at Schultz's flower shop to pick up some roses for Patricia.

It was a tradition in his marriage. "You don't just bring yourself home on your birthday," he had always insisted. Patricia loved roses, the long-stemmed ones with frail, yellowish, velvet petals.

The neatly packed flowers were in his arms when he was assaulted at a lonely alleyway only a block from home and taken prisoner. "Hold on to the flowers," one of his assailants grunted. "It'll save us buying them for your grave."

The other man laughed with a tingling menace as they grabbed his gun from his belt and forced him into their car.

Twenty hours passed before Headquarters got its first contact. "We've got Brooks," the call announced. "You'll never find

him alive unless you listen to our demands."

Commissioner Hopkins didn't have a chance to respond. That was it. The receiver had clicked malignantly.

The bristling tall man with the motorcycle leathers plastered to his legs turned from the attic gable in the dismal bedroom and hurled the phone at his captive who had been strapped to the bed overnight. The mouthpiece cut Brooks's eyelid and it bled.

It had been the first contact his captors had made with the police and now he knew more would follow. It was small relief but it was better than lying blindfolded and gagged with dirty cloths in his mouth and feeling as abandoned as a downed flyer on the highest snows of the Alps. He tried to yell through the ugly fuzziness of his gag.

He felt a vicious kick to his thigh. "Rest your tongue, copper. There's nothing you need know. You're our hostage. No better than those that the Arab guerrillas pick up. If we don't get what we want, you get shot in the head and buried deep in the cellar."

Brooks squirmed in a fierce effort to talk. "Want us to clear your throat? Okay. Help the man, Spike." The smaller of the two picked up the phone and dropped it flat on Brooks's face. "That make you feel better, copper? Any time you need to

go to the can, just let us know. We'll throw you in there. Throw, I said."

Both tormentors took off, and Brooks could hear them tripping down the stairs. His efforts to free himself were useless. He finally relaxed and tried to figure the basic reason for having been kidnapped. The word "hostage" uttered by his tall captor must have been some reference to the planned demand for the release of someone held by the police.

The name "Spike" was obviously not the name of the other man but could well have been a psychological slip identifying both as members of the Spike Gang, a dozen motorcyclists from Bridgeport who had invaded New York less than a week ago.

The girl in the group had shot a policeman after a robbery on 8th Ave. She was captured but he died hours later. The charge was now murder, and Brooks figured this could easily be the deal to free her.

After which? Brooks didn't like the thoughts that went through his mind. His captors were obviously high on some form of dope. They wouldn't hesitate to kill him.

And he had no weapon but the roses he had bought Patricia!

THE AFTERNOON wore on and the two returned. "You got a stupid force in this town, copper.

We rolled slowly around Headquarters five times. One hundred of the fuzz saw us. Not one even stopped us."

The television was turned on and an announcer was bemoaning the mystery of the disappearance of Officer Brooks. "... officials are awaiting a second call. More than 1000 police vehicles are searching the streets for the gang of wild ruffians that accompanied the girl. . ."

The set was clicked off. "We'll give 'em a second call," the tall man laughed scornfully. In minutes he had Hopkins on the wire. "We got a trade to make. Commissioner. Release Maidi Lee and give her twenty four hours to get away. Then you can have Brooks. Think it over or he dies for sure. Have the Archbishop get on the air waves. We want his word."

Brooks felt his heart pounding. The showdown was coming, and he had nothing to fight these dope-crazed hoods with but a gift of roses.

Then he got an idea. A gift. It was crazy, but it just might work. If he could just get his gag off.

Brooks hammered the matress. "He wants to talk. Open his mouth, Spike."

The gag was removed and Brooks sat up. He wasted no time. "In my coat is a one-cup sample of that brand new Karem Instant Coffee made by Conti-

mental Foods. It was mailed to every home in Connecticut."

"Very interesting info, copper," the tall man sneered. "So what?"

"So our stupid detectives arranged that every sample mailed to the nineteen members of Maidi Lee's immediate family contained a slow acting poison. It takes a week to work. It's the hope of getting her to reveal everyone in your mob in return for a secret counteracting chemical."

"Where did you get that stinking, made-up baby story, copper? Maidi's my girl. She's solid. You couldn't crack her if a hundred died. All I got to say to you is 'har-har.'" He spat at Brooks and giggled.

Spike stiffened. "Hold it a minute. Those are my people up there. How do I know if this rat is lying. Suppose. . . maybe if—"

"Go ahead. Kill me and they all

die," Brooks spoke softly. "Want to try?"

The tall man looked at Spike devastatingly "You believe that crap?"

"Maidi's my sister. Those are my people. I got to believe it!"

"Cop slop man. Even if it's true, let Maidi decide. They're her folks, too," The tall man drew his gun. "Up, copper! We're going to the cellar. I got to teach this kid to be hard." He unstrapped Brooks.

Johnny Brooks rose and gazed deeply into Spike's eyes. "You going to let him kill possibly nineteen in your family? There must be someone you love."

Spike whitened in a tremble. Suddenly he pounced at the gun. The barrel emptied as both struggled. Johnny Brook dialed his precinct.

"I talked these two punks into wounding each other. Come get me. I got roses for my wife."

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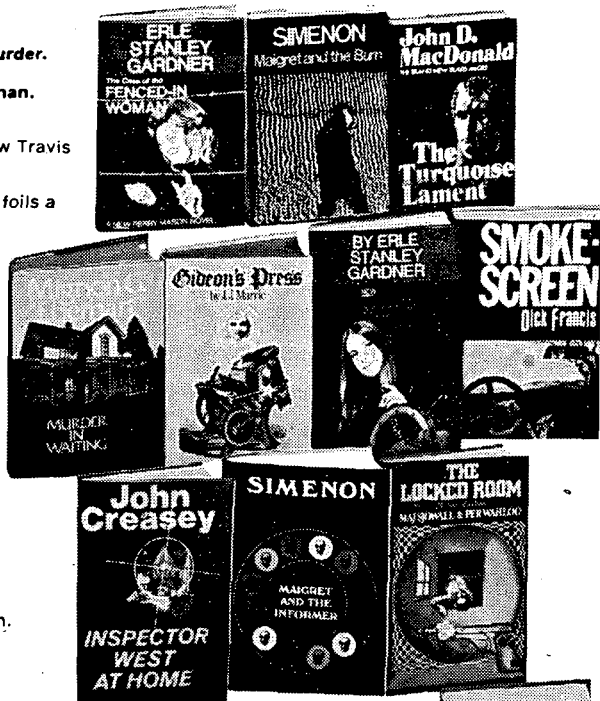
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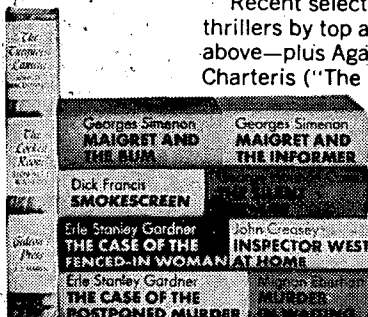
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